

Connecticut's Animal Cruelty Laws

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Issue

Summary of Connecticut's animal cruelty laws. **This report has been updated by OLR Report [2018-R-0215](#).**

Summary

Connecticut law prohibits many abusive behaviors toward animals and provides different penalties based on the severity of the abuse and the abuser's intent.

Connecticut's primary animal cruelty statute is comprised of five distinct crimes: cruelty to animals, malicious or intentional cruelty to animals, animals engaged in exhibition of fighting, and intentionally injuring or killing police animals or dogs in volunteer canine service and rescue teams ([CGS § 53-247](#)).

Other animal cruelty laws address the sale or treatment of animals unable to work; cruelty to poultry; sale or gift of dyed fowl or rabbits; use of animals, reptiles, and birds; docking of horses' tails; and transportation of animals on railroads.

Each of these crimes, the prohibited acts, and associated penalties are discussed below.

Animal cruelty violators face maximum fines ranging from \$200 to \$10,000, maximum imprisonment ranging from 30 days to 10 years, or both.

Animal Cruelty Case Outcomes

OLR Report [2018-R-0111](#) summarizes the case outcomes, from 2007 – 2017, for charges brought under the primary animal cruelty statute ([CGS § 53-247](#)).

Good Samaritan Law

[PA 18-164](#) provides an affirmative defense against civil damages or criminal penalties for entering another person's passenger motor vehicle to rescue an animal under certain circumstances (effective October 1, 2018).

Primary Animal Cruelty Laws

The law defines “animals” as all brute creatures and birds ([CGS § 29-108a](#)). Following are summaries of each of Connecticut’s animal cruelty laws.

Cruelty to Animals

[CGS § 53-247\(a\)](#) prohibits people from overdriving, overloading, overworking, torturing, depriving of substance, mutilating, cruelly beating or killing, or unjustifiably injuring any animal. The law prohibits a person who impounds or confines an animal from (1) failing to provide it with proper care; (2) neglecting to cage or restrain it from injuring itself or another animal; or (3) failing to provide it with wholesome air, food, and water.

The statute also bans unjustifiably administering or exposing a domestic animal to any poisonous or noxious drug or substance intending the animal to take it. Individuals who have custody of an animal may not treat it cruelly; fail to provide it with proper food, drink, or shelter; abandon it; or carry or cause it to be carried in a cruel manner. Fighting with or baiting, harassing, or worrying an animal to make it perform for amusement, diversion, or exhibition is also prohibited.

A first violation of any of the above provisions is punishable by a fine of up to \$1,000, imprisonment for up to one year, or both. Each subsequent offense is a class D felony, punishable by a fine of up to \$5,000, imprisonment for up to five years, or both.

Malicious or Intentional Cruelty to Animals

Under [CGS § 53-247\(b\)](#), it is a class D felony for a first offense, and class C felony for subsequent offenses, to maliciously and intentionally maim, mutilate, torture, wound, or kill an animal. This law does not apply to:

1. licensed veterinarians following accepted practice standards;
2. persons following approved slaughter methods;
3. students, employees, or persons performing medical research and associated with a hospital, educational institution, or laboratory; and
4. persons abiding by generally accepted agricultural practices or lawfully engaged in taking wildlife.

Animals Engaged in Exhibition of Fighting

Under [CGS § 53-247\(c\)](#), it is a class D felony to knowingly commit any of the following actions:

1. own, possess, keep, or train an animal engaged in fighting for amusement or gain;
2. possess, keep, or train an animal to fight in an exhibition for amusement or gain;
3. allow any of the above mentioned acts to occur on premises under one's control;
4. act as a judge or spectator at such an exhibition; or
5. bet or wage on the outcome of an exhibition.

Intentionally Injuring or Killing Police Animals or Dogs in Volunteer Canine Service and Rescue Teams

Under [CGS § 53-247\(d\)](#), intentionally injuring (1) an animal performing its duties under a peace officer's supervision or (2) a dog performing its duties as a member of a volunteer canine search and rescue team is a class D felony, punishable by a fine of up to \$5,000, up to five years imprisonment, or both. And under [CGS § 53-247\(e\)](#), intentionally killing such an animal is punishable by a fine of up to \$10,000, imprisonment for up to 10 years, or both.

Other Animal Cruelty Laws

Sale or Treatment of Animals Unable to Work

[CGS § 53-248](#) subjects, to fines up to \$200, imprisonment up to six months, or both, anyone who:

1. sells, offers to sell, trades, or gives away a horse to be worked that could not be worked in Connecticut without violating the animal cruelty laws or
2. leads, rides, or drives an animal on a public highway except to take the animal to a suitable place for its humane keeping or killing or for medical or surgical treatment.

Cruelty to Poultry

Under [CGS § 53-249](#) any container used to transport, ship, or hold live poultry for sale must be (1) in a sanitary condition and (2) constructed to provide sufficient ventilation and warmth. Under this statute, when the live poultry is in the container, they must receive reasonable care required to prevent unnecessary suffering. Violating this statute is a class D misdemeanor, punishable by up to 30 days in prison, fines up to \$250, or both.

Sale or Gift of Dyed Fowl or Rabbits

Under [CGS § 53-249a](#) anyone who sells, offers for sale at retail, or gives away live chickens, ducklings, other fowl, or rabbits, that have been dyed, colored, or otherwise given an artificial color, must be fined up to \$100.

Use of Animals, Reptiles, and Birds

Under [CGS § 53-250](#) it is a class D misdemeanor for anyone to:

1. use an animal, reptile, or bird to solicit alms, collection, contribution, subscription, donation, or payment of money;
2. use an animal or bird as a prize or award in a game or device;
3. exhibit a wild animal to attract business; or
4. own, keep, or have an animal, reptile, or bird in his or her custody for any of these purposes.

This does not apply to the use of animals in exhibitions by an educational institution, in a zoological garden, or in connection with a theatrical exhibition or circus. It also does not apply to the use of an animal in a cow-chip raffle.

Docking of Horses' Tails

[CGS § 53-251](#) imposes a fine up to \$300, imprisonment up to one year, or both on anyone who:

1. cuts the bone of the tail of any horse for the purpose of docking the tail (i.e., cutting the tail very short);
2. cuts the muscles or tendons of a horse's tail, or otherwise operates upon it in any manner for the purpose or with the effect of altering the natural carriage of the tail;
3. causes or knowingly permits such cutting or operation to be done on premises of which he or she is the owner, lessee, proprietor, or user; or
4. assists in or is present at such cutting or operation.

This law must not be construed to prevent a registered veterinarian from operating on the tail of a horse when necessary for the health of the horse or is the means of effecting the natural carriage of its tail.

Transportation of Animals on Railroads

[CGS § 53-252](#) prohibits railroad companies, in transporting animals, from confining them in cars for more than 28 consecutive hours without unloading the animals for food, water, and rest, for at least five consecutive hours, unless prevented by storm or other accidental cause. The law makes an exception for situations in which the animals are being transported in cars in which they have proper food, water, space, and the opportunity to rest. Violators are subject to a fine up to \$500.

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