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Testimony Concerning Raised Bill 7297
Gail Petras – Senior Animal Control Officer
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I would like to thank the Environment Committee for the opportunity to express my support of Raised Bill 7297 – AN ACT CONCERNING QUARANTINE AND DISPOSAL ORDERS OF ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICERS.

I have been an Animal Control Officer in Connecticut for over fifteen years. I am here on behalf of the CT Municipal Animal Control Officers' Association where I serve as a board member. I am also active in other organizations that support and offer annual training opportunities for ACOs. I was very excited when I was given the opportunity to be a part of the Department of Agriculture's working group which helped to draft this proposal. Our group was well-rounded and included Department of Agriculture staff, Animal Control Officers, a Veterinarian, a Police Sergeant, animal advocates, a dog attack victim and an elected official.

I work with many fine Animal Control Officers across the state that are attempting to raise the bar in our profession. This bill can help us do that by providing valuable criteria that will ensure our process is more uniform for all cities and towns in CT. The bill will also help to streamline the process of hearings and appeals.

The current language in C.G.S. 22-358 concerning restraint and disposal orders is very broad and open to interpretation. By adding criteria for the ACOs to consider such as the ability for the owner to control their animal, the severity of the injury, the viciousness of the attack and past bite history, whether the attacking animal was provoked in any way and whether the attacking animal was in the act of protecting its owner from harm, ACOs can make educated decisions about the type of order that best fits the situation. These guidelines will help ACOs to have more consistent resolutions statewide.

This proposal also redefines the restraint and disposal order appeal process. It allows for mediation between the municipality, the animal owner and victim to encourage an accelerated resolution and reduce the number of appeals that are handled by the Department of Agriculture's administrative hearing process. There have been numerous cases in CT where dogs have been in shelters awaiting a ruling for anywhere from two to six years. This is just not acceptable and in my opinion, it is not humane for the animals. Many of these dogs are or become aggressive and cannot be handled easily so they are stuck in a kennel with no real human contact for years. We realize that many of these dogs are not safe to live in society; however, they still deserve to be treated humanely and

should not be forced to suffer due to an overloaded system. We need to expedite this process.

As I am sure you can understand, animal bites and attacks are very stressful for all parties involved. In attempting to ensure public safety, ACOs are often ordering restrictions on family pets and sometimes ordering that a pet be euthanized. We do not take this responsibility lightly. We get caught between people wanting to save their pets and victims that are injured and afraid.

We all see news stories regularly about animal attacks and people wanting to save their animal's lives while others want to euthanize those animals. This proposal takes into account ALL parties involved; the victims, the animal owners, the dogs and the municipality as well as the safety of the general public.

This proposal also reduces the quarantine length for biting animals from 14 days to 10 days. I have been told that CT is the only state that has a 14 day quarantine period. 10 days is the time currently recommended by the CDC. This will ease the burden on municipal shelters by allowing a quicker release of animals.

The last point that I would like to mention is the change in allowing animals that are currently vaccinated to be quarantined at their home as long as the premises is adequate for the confinement of the animal. Currently, if an animal bite occurs off of the animal's property, the quarantine must be done off-property at an approved facility. To illustrate this, imagine you are at the park with your leashed, vaccinated, licensed dog and a loose dog runs up and attacks your dog. While attempting to separate the dogs, your own dog bites you or the other dog owner. Your dog would now need to be quarantined for 14 days at a facility at your expense. We come across these gray areas very often where law abiding citizens are forced to relinquish their dogs for 14 days due to unfortunate circumstances that are not vicious attacks but are understandable incidents. The control of rabies is our main concern in handling bite incidents; therefore, using a current rabies vaccination (which is required by law) as the criteria for an off-property quarantine makes much more sense.

Please support this proposal so that we may have an updated, progressive statute to help us with better protecting the public and ensuring a fair process for all.

Thank you,

Gail Petras