

Connecticut's Animal Cruelty Laws and Recent Legislation

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Issue

Summarize Connecticut's animal cruelty laws and related legislation in recent years. This report updates and expands 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, knowingly engaging in the exhibition of animal 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.

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

Animal Cruelty Case Outcomes

OLR Report [2019-R-0154](#) summarizes the case outcomes, from 2008 to 2018, for charges brought under the primary animal cruelty statute ([CGS § 53-247](#)).

Good Samaritan Law

The law 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 ([CGS § 52-557u](#), as amended by [PA 18-164, § 16](#)).

We identified at least 29 bills proposed in the past five years related to animal cruelty. They addressed topics such as providing immunity from liability for rescuing certain animals, increasing the penalty for certain offenses, establishing an animal abuse registry, prohibiting accelerated rehabilitation for animal abusers, providing animal advocates in courtrooms, and prohibiting convicted animal abusers from adopting animals. Five of these bills were enacted into law and one was vetoed.

Primary Animal Cruelty Law

Cruelty to Animals

[CGS § 53-247\(a\)](#) prohibits people from overdriving, overloading, overworking, torturing, depriving of sustenance, 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 up to one year in prison, a fine of up to \$1,000, or both. Each subsequent offense is a class D felony, punishable by up to five years in prison, a fine of up to \$5,000, 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.

A class C felony is punishable one to 10 years in prison, a fine of up to \$10,000, or both.

Engaging in Exhibition of Animal 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. And under [CGS § 53-247\(e\)](#), intentionally killing such an animal is punishable by up to 10 years in prison, a fine of up to \$10,000, or both.

Other Animal Cruelty Laws

Sale or Treatment of Animals Unable to Work

[CGS § 53-248](#) prohibits:

1. selling, offering to sell, trading, or giving away a horse to be worked that could not be worked in Connecticut without violating the animal cruelty laws described above and
2. leading, riding, or driving 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.

Violators are subject to up to six months in prison, a fine of up to \$200, or both.

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. When the live poultry is in the container, it 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 \$150.

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](#) prohibits anyone, except registered veterinarians, from:

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

Violators are subject to up to one year in prison, a fine of up to \$300, or both.

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.

Related Legislative Measures from 2015 to 2019

Table 1 summarizes animal cruelty-related legislative measures taken over the last five years and provides each bill's disposition.

Table 1: Animal Cruelty-Related Legislative Measures from 2015 to 2019

Bill/Public Act Number	Description	Died/Enacted/Vetoed
PA 19-82	Bans the practice of pet leasing, with the exception of specified animals (e.g., show animals)	Enacted
SB 470 (2019)	Would have prohibited persons convicted of animal abuse from adopting animals	Died in committee
HB 5362 (2019)	Would have increased, from D felony to a C felony, the penalty for intentionally injuring a police animal or dog in a volunteer canine search and rescue team	Died in committee
HB 5589 (2019)	Would have prohibited individuals previously convicted of animal abuse from adopting another animal	Died in committee
HB 6008 (2019)	Would have prohibited any individual convicted of animal abuse from adopting an animal	Died in committee
HB 6298 (2019)	Would have restricted the use of accelerated rehabilitation in animal cruelty cases	Died in committee
HB 6310 (2019)	Would have required a showing of good cause in order to invoke a pretrial program for accelerated rehabilitation on behalf of a person charged with intentional animal abuse	Died in committee
HB 6642 (2019)	Would have prohibited individuals convicted of animal abuse from adopting animals	Died in committee
PA 18-164 , § 16	Under certain circumstances, provides an affirmative defense against civil damages or criminal penalties to a person who enters a vehicle to remove an animal	Enacted (CGS § 52-557u)
PA 18-156	Would have required the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection to create and maintain a central record system (i.e., registry) of individuals convicted or found not guilty by reason of mental disease or defect of certain animal abuse crimes	Vetoed
SB 241 (2018)	Would have increased, to a class C felony, the criminal penalty for 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	Died in the House
HB 5572 (2018)	Would have prohibited someone charged with certain animal abuse offenses from participating in accelerated rehabilitation unless good cause is shown and based upon the prosecutor's statements in open court	Died in the Senate
SB 130 (2017)	Would have (1) required a 5% surcharge on the total adoption fee for any animal	Died in the Senate

Bill/Public Act Number	Description	Died/Enacted/Vetoed
	adopted from a municipal dog pound, animal shelter, or animal adoption or rescue organization in Connecticut and (2) the Department of Agriculture commissioner to deposit the surcharge fees into the animal abuse cost recovery account and use the fees to fund the Second Chance Large Animal Rehabilitation Program	
SB 602 (2017)	Would have reestablished the Task Force to Study the Humane Treatment of Animals in Municipal and Regional Shelters	Died in the House
HB 5423 (2017)	Would have established a searchable database of animal abusers that can be accessed by law enforcement officials and the public	Died in committee
HB 5501 (2017)	Would have required the establishment of an animal abuser registry	Died in committee
HB 5978 (2017)	Would have (1) created an animal cruelty offender registry to be administered by the Judicial Department, that would be maintained for two years for first-time offenders and five years for repeat offenders; (2) required breeders and sellers of cats and dogs to check the registry before selling or transferring an animal; and (3) provided that refusal to sell or transfer to an offender on the registry would be legally justified	Died in committee
HB 5988 (2017)	Would have provided immunity from liability for a person who rescues an animal from a hot car	Died in committee
PA 16-30	Allows judges to appoint volunteers, from a list of attorneys and law students provided by the agriculture commissioner, to advocate for the interests of justice in certain proceedings involving animals	Enacted (CGS § 54-86n)
PA 16-96	Increased the penalty for a subsequent offense of malicious and intentional animal cruelty by classifying it as a class C felony, instead of a class D felony	Enacted (CGS § 53-247(b))
SB 228 (2016)	Would have allowed a court to award up to \$7,500 in damages to an owner of a service dog that someone unlawfully and intentionally kills or injures	Died in the House
SB 415 (2016)	Would have made a person charged with animal cruelty involving malicious or intentional maiming, mutilating, torturing, wounding, or killing an animal ineligible for (1) accelerated rehabilitation or (2) the pretrial supervised diversionary program for people with psychiatric disabilities and certain veterans with mental health conditions	Died in the Senate
PA 15-201	Among other things, requires public and private higher education institutions, under certain circumstances, to offer any cat or dog on which they conducted research or testing to an animal adoption or rescue organization for adoption.	Enacted
SB 44 (2015)	Would have prohibited individuals charged with committing animal abuse from using accelerated rehabilitation to avoid prosecution and clear their record	Died in committee
SB 361 (2015)	Would have increased the penalty for maliciously and intentionally maiming, mutilating, torturing, wounding, or killing an animal (a class D felony) to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st offense - up to seven years in prison, a fine of up to \$5,000, or both • subsequent offense - a class C felony, punishable by one to 10 years in prison, a fine of up to \$10,000, or both 	Died in the House
SB 1128 (2015)	Would have prevented individuals charged with committing animal abuse from using accelerated rehabilitation	Died in committee
HB 5149 (2015)	Would have established a searchable database of convicted animal abusers which could be accessed by law enforcement officials	Died in committee

Bill/Public Act Number	Description	Died/Enacted/Vetoed
HB 5688 (2015)	Would have prohibited anyone from tethering or confining any gestating sow, egg-laying hen, or calf raised for veal, on a farm, for all or the majority of any day, in a manner that would prevent the animal from (1) lying down, standing up, and fully extending its limbs and (2) turning around freely	Died in committee
HB 5698 (2015)	Would have established an animal abuse registry and required individuals convicted of animal abuse in Connecticut to register	Died in committee
HB 5725 (2015)	Would have banned the use of gestation crates for sows in Connecticut	Died in committee

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