

March 18, 2026

Testimony of Joshua Levin, Legislative & Advocacy Manager

In SUPPORT of HB 5566 – An Act Concerning Accelerated Rehabilitation in the Case of Animal Cruelty

Co-Chairs Winfield and Stafstrom, Vice Chairs Flexer, Gadkar-Wilcox, and Fazzino, Ranking Members Kissel and Fishbein, and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support of HB 5566 An Act Concerning Accelerated Rehabilitation in the Case of Animal Cruelty.**

On behalf of CT Votes for Animals and our Connecticut members, I appreciate your continued commitment to strengthening animal welfare and public safety. Your thoughtful work on HB 5566 reflects a meaningful step toward addressing gaps in oversight within our current system.

HB 5566 increases accountability in animal cruelty cases by establishing clearer standards for when Accelerated Rehabilitation (AR) may be granted. By clarifying the conditions tied to the program, the bill affirms that animal cruelty is a serious offense, while still preserving judicial discretion in appropriate circumstances.

Animal cruelty is not an isolated incident—it is a warning sign of future violence. Violence towards animals is strongly linked to violence towards people, including intimate partner violence (IPV), child abuse, elder abuse, and other serious offenses.¹ Research indicates that animal abuse is stronger predictor of sexual violence than previous homicide, arson, or firearms convictions. Additionally, 63% of aggressive offenders reported deliberately causing harm to animals during their childhood, and 71% of IPV survivors report that their partner previously harmed, killed, or threatened their pets.¹

The Committee's measured and deliberate approach to HB 5566 is commendable. Building on this strong foundation, **the bill could be further strengthened by specifying which animal cruelty offenses are eligible for AR**, establishing an appropriate balance between second chances and appropriate consequences.

Regulating Accelerated Rehabilitation Eligibility

Accelerated Rehabilitation serves an important purpose in our justice system by offering individuals the opportunity to avoid a permanent criminal record. However, **not every offense—and not every offender—warrants that opportunity.** By placing meaningful limitations on AR in animal cruelty cases, HB 5566 would strengthen accountability for crimes that are often severe, intentional, and associated with high rates of recidivism.

There are certain cases where AR is appropriate, particularly for minor, non-violent offenses such as leaving a dog in a hot car. But more serious acts involving intentional harm, torture, disfigurement, or death should not qualify. As currently drafted, HB 5566, does not create a distinction between severity levels of animal cruelty when determining AR eligibility. Incorporating such distinctions would support earlier identification of dangerous patterns of behavior, protect vulnerable populations, and reinforce public confidence in the justice system.

¹ National Link Coalition. (n.d.). The Link Between Violence to People and Violence to Animals.
<https://nationallinkcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/LinkSummaryBooklet-16pp.pdf>

This can be achieved by defining “serious” as used in subsection (a) of section 54-56e of the Connecticut General Statutes. Currently, the statute permits AR use for offenses “not of a serious nature,”² but does not clearly define that term, leaving room for inconsistent application in animal cruelty cases.

A definition of “serious” could include:

- Intentional physical harm to an animal;
- Acts resulting in serious injury or death;
- Prolonged deprivation of care, including starvation or neglect;
- Patterns of criminal negligence, including hoarding; and
- Offenses associated with a high likelihood of recidivism.

HB 5566 is a strong step forward. With these targeted refinements, it can more fully ensure that the most serious acts of cruelty are treated with the gravity they deserve while maintaining judicial discretion in appropriate cases.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **support HB 5566**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

² Connecticut General Statutes. § 54-56e (a). https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_960.htm#sec_54-56e