



Vermont Humane Federation

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Dear Members of the Vermont House Committee on Judiciary,

The Vermont Humane Federation (VHF) is a strong, unified network of animal welfare organizations and individuals across the state whose mission is dedicated to promoting the welfare of animals. The collaborative efforts and resources used to address statewide issues like animal cruelty, pet homelessness, and legislative advocacy have been an ongoing effort benefiting both the animals and people here in Vermont for many years. On behalf of our member organizations, we are pleased to provide our full support for H. 578, an act relating to penalties and procedures for animal cruelty offenses.

We'd like to thank Rep. Krasnow for introducing this critical animal welfare bill, as well as thank the Vermont legislature for recently creating the new director of animal welfare position currently held by Lisa Milot. Lisa has been a welcome addition to our state and has been a great listener and collaborator as she collects critical information for her report. We look forward to working with her and our state lawmakers to advance the goals of Vermont's new Division of Animal Welfare.

This bill has many great provisions and addresses one of the most significant barriers facing law enforcement officers who enforce Vermont's animal cruelty statute – the lack of housing and care options for animals who are legally seized. In the past, this role has often been filled by local animal shelters working in partnership with the law enforcement agencies handling the cases. The deep-rooted commitment to the humane treatment of animals, along with supporting the people involved, has so often resulted in the housing and care of an inordinate number of animals for an indefinite period of time. While these circumstances fall under the umbrella of law enforcement, there has typically been no financial reimbursement or additional staff provided to these non-profit organizations assisting with this complex aspect of any given case. VHF is aware of a number of cases in the past that have significantly affected member organizations financially, even to a point of temporary closure. We ask that, after all these years, the Committee recognize how important it is to implement a state process that is fair, reasonable and efficient.

With further focus on the animals that can be in limbo for very long periods of time before cases are adjudicated, it should be noted that animals can be susceptible to physical and/or behavioral decline as time passes. Just as importantly, animals not released for adoption occupy space that could be used for adoptable animals, putting added stress on shelters, people and the communities they serve. Simply put, the state's non-profit animal shelters don't have the space or funding to house seized animals for an indefinite period. It is essential that Vermont law provides a mechanism to address animal welfare cases quickly so that relinquished animals can be properly cared for and eventually rehomed as appropriate.

VHF members are: Addison County Humane Society – Homeward Bound • Central Vermont Humane Society • Felines and Friends • Franklin County Animal Rescue • Francis of Assisi Society for Animals • HEART Wildlife Removal • Humane Society of Chittenden County • Kingdom Animal Shelter • Lucy Mackenzie Humane Society • North Country Animal League • PAWSitive Pantry • Protect Our Wildlife • Riverside Rescue • Rutland County Humane Society • Spay ASAP, Inc. • Springfield Humane Society • VT Disaster Animal Response Team • VT-CAN! • Windham County Humane Society

The VHF also supports the bill's enhancements and increased penalties for animal sexual abuse, which has strong ties to the sexual abuse of people, especially women and children. We support increasing the minimum time period, for the forfeiture of future rights to own and live with animals, of convicted animal abusers to not less than 5 years. We would also be supportive of designating an existing or special prosecutor to lead animal cruelty cases as this would likely add expertise and efficiency to the process. Prosecutors aren't always familiar with Vermont's animal cruelty code, and having someone who is dedicated to leading and consulting on these specialized cases would streamline the process and save money and lives.

Thank you for your consideration. We urge your yes vote on this important animal welfare measure, H. 578. This legislative effort will undoubtedly make an important difference for both the animals and people in Vermont.

Sincerely,



Jackie Stanley
President, Vermont Humane Federation

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