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Testimony
Judiciary Committee
S.B. 523 An Act Concerning An Animal Abuse Registry
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Senator Kissel, Senator Doyle, Representative Tong, Representative Rebimbas and members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you all for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 523 An Act Concerning An Animal Abuse Registry.

I requested this bill to be raised because I believe Connecticut can and should be a national leader when it comes to protecting animals and being proactive about preventing crime. While certain county governments have implemented animal abuse registries across the country, currently only one state, Tennessee, has a statewide registry to keep track of those who abuse animals. I am proposing that Connecticut follow the model implemented in Tennessee to become the second state in the country, and the first in the northeast region, to track those who abuse animals. Currently, at least 10 other states are also considering similar legislation¹, showing the increasing awareness regarding the benefits of keeping track of these perpetrators to prevent animal abusers from being allowed to adopt animals or care for pets that they may harm.

Creating an animal abuse registry would first and foremost allow the state to better monitor and prevent animal abusers from gaining access to other animals through adoption or through jobs involving the care of animals. An animal abuse registry would be a resource for police, pet shelters, animal adoption centers, groomers and other employers to identify convicted animal abusers who are trying to adopt or purchase an animal, who are trying to apply for a job working with animals, or who are involved in new allegations of abuse. A registry will help prevent individuals who cannot care for a pet or are dangerous to be around animals from interacting with or owning animal companions that they may harm.

In addition, research has shown a connection between animal abuse and criminal violence against people. Therefore, an animal abuse registry could be an important tool in understanding warning signs of violence and getting people help before criminal behavior escalates. Some studies have shown that for those arrested for animal crimes, as many as 65% of those offenders have been arrested for battery against a person. Other studies have shown a high number of

¹ <https://www.navs.org/state-animal-abuser-registries-proposed-2018/#.WrV04oKou70>

murderers having previously committed acts of animal torture as adolescents. Pet abuse can be a predictor in domestic partner violence and child abuse situations. Animal neglect has also been known to be an indicator of household stress, mental illness or other issues.² It is for all these reasons that the FBI now collects data for animal cruelty, a Class A felony. If Connecticut had a statewide registry to keep track of those convicted of abuse, we could do more to prevent repetitive abuse, avoid placing animals in dangerous situations, and perhaps even better understand the warning signs before additional crimes and acts of violence are committed.

This bill proposes to adopt the same system implemented by the Tennessee Animal Abuser Registration Act, which required the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) to post to its website a list of persons convicted of the following criminal offenses against animals: (1) aggravated animal cruelty; (2) felony animal fighting; (3) bestiality and related offenses.

The Tennessee registry, which was made public 2016, includes animal abusers' full legal names, photographs, and other identifying data the TBI determines is necessary to identify abusers and to exclude innocent persons. The list does not include abusers' social security numbers, driver license numbers, or any other state or federal identification number. You can view the Tennessee registry at the following link <https://www.tn.gov/tbi/tennessee-animal-abuse-registry.html>.

The Tennessee law requires that court clerks provide the TBI with a convicted person's information within 60 calendar days of a judgement regarding a qualifying animal abuse offense. Upon a first conviction of an animal abuse offense, a person will remain on the list for two years only, unless that person commits another animal abuse offense during that time. If a person is convicted of a second animal abuse offense that person will remain on the list for five years. If a sole offense is expunged a person would also be removed from the list.

In Connecticut, I would propose adopting the same structure. In place of Tennessee's TBI, Connecticut's registry would be most appropriately managed by the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection.

In summary, I believe the Tennessee animal abuse registry model is a system that Connecticut can easily adopt to significantly increase our ability to prevent animal abuse and violent crimes against animal companions and perhaps even people. I look forward to a continued discussion on this issue and thank you for the opportunity to advocate for this important public safety measure.



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² http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/abuse_neglect/qa/cruelty_violence_connection_faq.html