

To whom it may concern.

I am Beth Saradarian, the Executive Director at the Rutland County Humane Society. I am strong supporter of this bill to help the animals and people in the state of Vermont.

### **Establish a Division of Animal Welfare at the Department of Public Safety**

There are a number of reasons why this is so important:

I believe it should be part of the Department of Public Safety because the animal welfare laws in the state need to be followed and this is where laws are enforced. From the Department of Public Safety website, "the statutory purpose of the Department of Public Safety is to promote the detection and prevention of crime..."

There is much confusion from the public about who to contact about animal neglect and cruelty concerns. They often call us and we send them to the local Animal Control Officer, Fish and Wildlife, local law enforcement or even VSP. We often get calls back saying they haven't heard back or nothing has been done and they want to know who to call next. Sometimes we tell them to call the town directly as they hire the ACO so if there is an issue with the ACO it's the town's concern. We had a situation a year or so ago with a dog in distress that could have been prosecuted but the state's attorney had concerns about the level of training from the ACO (training is also confusing) and said the case couldn't go forward which was quite unfortunate for that dog. Having a centralized place where people can call and get responses and have trained and qualified people available to assist is required in VT. Law enforcement expertise, veterinary expertise and other needed resources are scarce so many situations go without follow up because the resources are unavailable. The veterinarians who are involved with these cases should be compensated. Done correctly, these cases take a lot of time with on-site work, photographs, documentation, medical care etc.

There is no funding for these cases when they hit our small shelters. We had a case in 2020 with a farm where 40 animals were seized over the course of 2 days and we cared for them. They were surrendered to us after 4 days but in the meantime we spent \$11,163.58 on their care after they'd been seized which we have never been reimbursed for. Funding this bill is important for small organizations like RCHS as we cannot bear these burdens alone anymore. We were fortunate that they were surrendered to us as quickly as they were or we would have had to hold them as evidence which would have been very expensive for us. One of the dogs had 10 puppies and the rabbits produced 62 baby rabbits so the numbers increased quickly. The total number was 119 animals from this farm. Even though the animals were surrendered after 4 days, those animals, and all of the offspring, became our responsibility in a short period of time which caused strained resources (including staff, volunteers, housing, medical and associated animal expenses). We had another case with 9 Samoyed dogs which were seized in November of 2012 and finally surrendered to us in March of 2013. During that time these canines were in our care as evidence which put an unbelievable strain on our resources for months. Small shelters like ours cannot continue to shoulder these situations alone which is why I agree that this Division of Animal Welfare needs to be funded. There are a lot of these cases. Some are smaller and some are larger and there are others out there.

### **Amend or establish standards for the operation of animal shelters and animal rescue organizations**

While many people are good intentioned, things can get out of hand quickly. We had a situation a number of years ago in Rutland County where organizations in the southern part of the U.S. were transporting animals to a rescue in VT which turned out to be a woman in her home and not a rescue at all. We accompanied law enforcement to the home where many dogs were living in deplorable conditions. The dogs came to RCHS and were eventually signed over to us. We were able to help and take a few dogs from the case in Eden a few years ago where many dogs were also living in deplorable conditions in a rescue that got out of hand. If there were standards of operations and shelters and rescues were checked on a consistent basis, these dogs never would have ended up in the situations where they found themselves.

**Amend or establish requirements for the importation or transportation of animals into the State**

We get many calls from people who have adopted animals, mostly dogs, from rescues or directly from the southern part of the U.S. They tell us about behavior problems and health problems with the dog and they can't get hold of the rescue or the rescue won't take the dog back and they want to surrender them to us. In one situation the now adult dog that was biting people was adopted as a puppy and the original organization wouldn't take him back because now that it's grown their kennels can't fit adults. They only have housing for puppies. In another situation someone adopted a dog from a rescue in VT and surrendered it to us. When we reached out to the rescue we were told it was the holidays and they had no foster homes available so we would have to keep the dog. These situations then become our problems and we are saddled with behavioral or medical issues with the dogs. The citizens who adopted these dogs from these organizations are devastated emotionally, physically and financially as a result. There is no recourse for them or for us.

Thank you for your time and consideration with this bill. I can provide more details and more examples if you need them.

*Beth Saradarian*

Executive Director

Rutland County Humane Society