

From: Joyce Cameron

Subject: [External] H.626 written testimony for Gov Ops

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Memorandum In Support of H.626

The work completed by the Vermont Humane Federation and its statewide stakeholders over the last several years has confirmed that the unregulated transportation and/or importation of feline and canine companion animals into Vermont and a lack of cohesion with existing animal welfare laws and oversight poses health, financial, and emotional risks to Vermonters. It is clear that unification of efforts through a Division of Animal Welfare in state government is critical to mitigate what we and many believe to be an ongoing public safety issue for Vermonters.

Practitioners in the field bear witness daily to the consequences of a patchwork of statutes sprinkled throughout government agencies with little, if any oversight and enforcement. This manifests in ways that are incongruent to the promotion of health and well-being of animals and people in Vermont. We see aggressive animals who have bitten people, sometimes severely, which have been transported from other states; we receive animals from drug houses around the state covered in Fentanyl; nefarious breeders are promulgating the sale of dangerous animals that wind up in our care putting our employees and the community at risk; and a rise in animal cruelty cases throughout the state that are met with confusion and a lack of cohesion around enforcement.

Vermont can and must do better.

Humane Societies are no longer just 'shelters'. They are complex social service organizations charged with serving both animals and people in the many communities throughout the state. There is an unreasonable burden placed on these and other organizations to navigate the public health and safety issues that should be addressed by local and state government. Creating a Division of Animal Welfare is warranted. This could be staffed through a re-assignment of current government staff or a newly created position. We believe that the cost to Vermonters would be offset by the savings realized through the purging of the tremendous amount of resources and services we provide on a daily basis to ameliorate the shortcomings of the way animal welfare is governed in Vermont.

Respectfully,

Joyce Cameron (she, her, hers)
President & CEO
Humane Society of Chittenden County