

**Animal Cruelty Investigation Advisory Board**

**(Created by Act No. 155 of 2016)**

**2023 Report to the House and Senate Committees on Judiciary, House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, and Senate Committee on Agriculture**

***Animal Cruelty Investigation Advisory Board***

*Erika Holm*, Central Vermont Humane Society, **Chair**

*Sally Adams, Esq.*, State's Attorneys and Sheriffs Association, **Vice Chair**

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January 16, 2024

2016 Act No. 155, Section 1943 tasked the creation of an Animal Cruelty Investigation Advisory Board (ACIAB) for the purpose of reviewing Vermont's existing systems for investigation and responding to animal cruelty complaints, and making recommendation to the Legislature regarding a streamlined, collaborative process that provides the best services to Vermont's animals statewide, and to advise on issues involving the cooperation and coordination of all agencies that exercise animal welfare responsibilities.

Previous reports have indicated that the greatest barrier to the development of a "streamlined, collaborative process that provides the best services to Vermont's animals ii statewide" is the fact that there is no single state office, agency, department, or staff member who is dedicated to addressing questions of animal welfare and building a system to support it. As we have indicated in several of our past reports, animal welfare laws and regulations, the violations of which could lead to instances of cruelty, currently are a patchwork affair that desperately needs centralization. Some are housed at the municipal level, some at the county level; some at the state level. Some are the purview of law enforcement, some of the judicial system, some of the Agency of Agriculture, and some of the Department of Children and Families. Addressing questions of animal welfare and animal cruelty response in this environment is like fixing a window in a house that has no foundation, and the players involved in "cooperation and coordination of all agencies that exercise animal welfare responsibilities" are too various, and have too many competing interests, to be effective in this arena. The result is that members of the private, non-profit sector have shouldered the work of dealing with the victims of animal cruelty, and of demonstrating the need for the state to recognize animal welfare as one of its responsibilities to support.

On January 15, 2023, Act 147, Section 38 (H.729) Report: Unification of Animal Welfare and Related Public Safety Functions was released, including a model for legislation that would address all the issues the ACIAB had worked on the past seven years. In 2023 we focused our attention on getting a bill ready to be presented to the legislature in 2024. With input from the ACIAB, and other experienced animal welfare advocates, that bill has been written, and was referred to the House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry on January 4, 2024 (H.626).

Members of the ACIAB look forward to being invited to participate further in the process of passing this significant legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

Erika Holm, Chair