

Animal Cruelty Investigation Advisory Board
2020 Report to the House and Senate Committees on Judiciary, House Committee on
Agriculture and Forest Products, and Senate Committee on Agriculture
Act No. 155 of 2016

Animal Cruelty Investigation Advisory Board
LT. Robert Lucas, Department of Public Safety
Kristin M. Haas, DVM, State Veterinarian
Gwynn Zakov, Vermont League of Cities and Towns
Erika Holm, Central Vermont Humane Society
Jessica Danyow, Addison County Humane Society
Mary McFaun, Vermont Federation of Dogs Clubs
Jennifer Firpo, Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council
Chad Barret, Department of Fish and Wildlife
Dr. William E. Brady Jr., Veterinarian
Sally Adams, Esq. State's Attorneys and Sheriffs Association
Vacant, Representative of the Vermont Police Association

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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 investigating and responding to animal cruelty complaints, and making recommendations to the Legislature regarding a streamlined, collaborative process that provides the best services to Vermont's animals statewide.

We, the members of the Animal Cruelty Investigations Advisory Board, are grateful for the attention given to our recommendations on how to improve the oversight and execution of animal welfare responsibilities within the state.

This question has been considered and debated within the state's animal welfare community and state government for many years. Members of this Board have been personally involved in efforts that date back as far as 2004. Previous reports have noted that part of the reason this question remains unresolved is that there is no unified framework for addressing these issues and we would like to reiterate this point. Addressing questions of animal welfare and animal cruelty response is like fixing a window in a house that has no foundation and we have proposed that the state

consider developing a division of animal welfare within an existing department of state government. To test the temperature of public interest in state oversight of animal welfare, we solicited a question on the 2020 University of Vermont's Center for Rural Studies annual poll and learned that 72% of Vermonters polled supported some form of state funding for investigating and addressing animal cruelty in Vermont. Having shared this, we fully recognize that the state's resources and attention are currently and rightly focused on the economy and the pandemic.

While we still hold a vision of such a department being created, we are currently committed to working within the existing structure to make improvements for Vermont's animals. In 2020 we worked closely with the House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry to refine the definition of who may investigate animal cruelty and to increase the accountability of such persons, known as humane officers. The work resulted in a committee bill, H. 940 (<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2020/Docs/BILLS/H-0940/H-0940%20As%20Introduced.pdf>) that was passed out of committee just as the state's "Stay Home Stay Safe" Executive Order went into effect. H. 940 seeks to redefine humane officer and to clarify the training requirements and accountability for such officers.

Other 2020 work we engaged in addressed one of our Act 155 mandates, "to develop a guide to animal cruelty prosecution, including a review of current sentencing recommendations for State's Attorneys." We have collected resources, engaged practicing State's Attorneys to review our work, and are beginning to draft a guide. The restrictions of the pandemic negatively impacted our ability to make progress on this project, but we are committed to finishing it in 2021.

We have also begun work on adapting how animal cruelty investigation training can be made more economical, portable, and virtual. In 2021 we will be examining the current offerings (typically offered in person at the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council over 4 days in the fall) to see how they can be condensed and offered on a regular, affordable basis.

In conclusion, we hope 2021 allows us to support the committees in introducing and working for the passage of a bill similar to H. 940, to complete a guide for State's Attorneys, and to adapt current trainings to our virtual era.

Thank you for your attention and for all the work that you are doing to advance the complex interests of Vermonters.