



Vermont Humane Federation, PO Box 311, Waterbury, VT 05676
802-244-5895

www.vermonthumane.org

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ♦ Best Friends Animal Society
Central Vermont Humane Society ♦ Feline & Friends Foundation ♦ Franklin County Humane Society ♦ Good Karma Rescue
Green Mountain Animal Defenders ♦ The Hooved Animal Sanctuary ♦ Homeward Bound Animal Welfare Center
Humane Society of Chittenden County ♦ Humane Society of the United States ♦ Lucy Mackenzie Humane Society ♦ North Country Animal League
PETS of the Kingdom ♦ Riverside Rescue, Inc. ♦ Rutland County Humane Society ♦ Second Chance Animal Center ♦ Spring Hill Horse Rescue
Springfield Humane Society ♦ Spay ASAP ♦ Vermont Companion Animal Neutering, Inc. ♦ Windham County Humane Society

MEMORANDUM

To: Vermont House Judiciary Committee

From: The Vermont Humane Federation

Re: Support for S. 237, an Act Relating to Civil Forfeiture Proceedings in Cases of Animal Cruelty

Date: March 26, 2014

The Vermont Humane Federation (VHF) is in strong support of S. 237, which makes significant and necessary improvements to Vermont's civil forfeiture law. VHF members routinely respond to animal cruelty complaints state-wide, and encourage and facilitate reporting through a website, ReportAnimalCruelty.com, and toll-free number, 1-866-9-HUMANE. In the past 5 years we have fielded more than 2,300 complaints through the website alone. These figures do *not* include more than 40,000 complaints that have gone directly to law enforcement agencies and municipalities in the same time period.

Civil forfeiture proceedings, addressed in the current statute, are designed to allow for a timely hearing in cases in which live animals are seized as evidence; however, they are often not held in a timely manner, if at all. Law enforcement officials must depend on private, non-profit animal shelters to care for seized animals (which often have medical and behavioral challenges) until final disposition of the case. This cost is born solely by the private sector, and can easily cripple organizations with limited budgets and space.

In a recent example, PETS of the Kingdom in Derby, VT took possession of 6 draft horses from a case in Jeffersonville on January 8, 2012, on behalf of the Vermont State Police. Fourteen months later, the case was finally settled in a criminal trial. The original judge in the case refused to hear a motion for forfeiture prior to the outcome of the criminal trial, which would have allowed the horses to be placed in permanent homes, leaving the shelter on the hook for providing care for an extended period of time to animals in state police custody. The cost to the shelter was more than \$25,000, not taking into account the in-kind donations provided by foster homes. This case could have easily bankrupted this small, all-volunteer organization if they hadn't received grants and private donations to assist with the cost of care for these animals.

Please see the attached Fact Sheet for more examples of the high cost of animal cruelty to the private and municipal sector in Vermont.

We thank you for your consideration of this important measure.

*The VHF is a strong, unified network of organizations and individuals
dedicated to promoting the welfare of animals*