



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

Testimony By: Barry Londeree
Presented To: Vermont Senate Committee on Judiciary
In Support Of: S. 12, An act relating to increasing the maximum prison sentence for first, second, and subsequent offenses of aggravated animal cruelty
Date: January 25, 2017

Dear Chairman Sears, Vice Chairman Benning and Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Barry Londeree. I am the Vermont State Director for The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), and I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of S.12 on behalf of our Vermont members and supporters.

S.12, introduced by Sen. Bobby Starr, would increase the maximum prison sentence for the first offense of aggravated animal cruelty to five years and increase the maximum prison sentence for second and subsequent offenses of aggravated animal cruelty to seven years. HSUS supports these maximum sentence increases and believes it properly reflects the serious nature of these offenses.

The Committee also received testimony at a previous hearing on this bill about the possibility of adding additional “tiers” of offenses and corresponding penalties that distinguish between “reckless behavior” and intentional conduct. HSUS would also support this change as it would provide State’s Attorneys with additional options to pursue appropriate charges and sentences commensurate to the crimes committed.

Attention to the issue of animal cruelty prosecutions is warranted. There is general frustration among many people involved in animal cruelty investigations on behalf of animal shelters and rescue groups that animal-related crimes are often insufficiently charged or prosecuted. Aggravated animal cruelty charges or imprisonment for animal cruelty convictions are exceedingly rare. Hopefully, additional options for animal cruelty charges combined with lengthened maximum prison sentences will encourage changes in prosecutorial decisions.

As this Committee considers legislation to improve the sentencing options for behavior, animal cruelty, that is already illegal under Vermont law, I believe it is an appropriate opportunity to consider prohibiting an offense that is also abhorrent, but currently legal: animal sexual abuse.

Animal sexual abuse, commonly referred to as bestiality, is cruel to animals and a serious issue linked to other crimes. Case after case has shown that bestiality has strong ties to pedophilia and the FBI has found high rates of sexual assault of animals in the backgrounds of many serial sexual homicide predators.

Vermont is one of only eight states, the only one north of West Virginia, where bestiality is not explicitly prohibited. The Internet facilitates this crime and allows it to flourish. Perpetrators use various websites, such as *Beast Forum*, to seek out one another where they trade, rent, and sell animals for sexual purposes. As with any other crime, weak laws make a state more vulnerable to the activity and the prevalence of this problem is only likely to grow the longer Vermont remains the only state in New England that permits the sexual abuse of animals. For these reasons, I ask that you consider including a prohibition on animal sexual abuse in this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony and your Committee's attention to this important legislation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Barry Londeree". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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