



Agency of Human Services
State of Vermont
Department of Corrections

To: Joint Justice Oversight Committee

From: Lisa Menard, Commissioner, Department of Corrections

Date: September 20, 2016

Subject: Report on ACT 155 Section 8: Department of Corrections Animal Care Pilot Program

Act 155 Sec. 8 establishes the ability for the Department of Corrections to implement a pilot program in at least one correctional facility that would permit qualified inmates to provide temporary care, on-site, for animals on a weekly or more frequent basis. It requires the Commissioner to report on the Department's progress towards implementation of the program, with recommendations as to whether it could include caring for animals that have been seized or relinquished in cruelty or neglect investigations, to the Joint Committee on Justice Oversight on or before September 1, 2016.

The Department of Corrections has made several attempts to start an Animal Care Program within correction facilities. In 2014, the Department partnered with the Blue Star Mothers of Vermont in an effort to train service dogs for veteran with special needs. Prior to placement in a facility, animals spent 6-8 months with a community volunteer to receive basic behavior training. After that community training period, the dogs were placed with an offender who was screened and trained to provide specialized training.

Animals were placed the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility and Southern State Correctional Facility. The program was suspended prior to placing an animal at Northern State Correctional Facility.

The Department has researched several options to a pilot and has determined that an animal care program could be implemented at the Southeast State Correctional Facility in Windsor. This facility has 28 acres of fenced in property and is the most ideal location for a successful program. The Volunteer Coordinator at the facility will run the program in collaboration with the NH



Representative of the Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society in West Windsor, VT. The program will provide behavioral enrichment & basic obedience training to shelter and rescue dogs. It will also provide education and training to sentenced inmates serving at the facility on homeless dogs and canine behavior. The inmates participating in the program are housed in the transitional unit away from main building. This will allow for shelter or rescue dogs to live inside the transitional housing unit for eight weeks to learn basic obedience and training skills.

The Department will develop an objective list of criteria for participant selection and maintain a record of why inmates were selected. Additionally, it will develop the same for conditions under which an inmate may be bounced from the program. And if that were to occur, maintain a record of why.

The DOC is still planning the logistics of the program. The anticipated start date is to be determined. The DOC will have to engage in bargaining with the VSEA prior to implementing the program. Any program start would be put on hold pending the outcome of the bargaining.

At this time the Department does not recommend introducing a program for seized or neglected animals. The dogs previously introduced to the facility were trained animals from supported homes. Even these animals presented behavior issues when placed in a facility setting. It would be more dangerous to introduced who have been seized or relinquished from cruelty or neglect investigations. Additionally, the Department has concerns regarding the animals seized in cruelty cases considered evidence. When an animal is evidence, they cannot be trained or socialized. This would severely impact the intended outcome of the program for offenders.