

My name is Laurie Garrison, a resident of Plainfield. I am Vice President of the Vermont Humane Federation, and was Executive Director of the Central Vermont Humane Society (CVHS, located in East Montpelier) between 2016-2022, and have been Co-Executive Director of CVHS since July 2022.

CVHS serves both Washington and Orange counties, and across the state when needed. In recent years, especially since the pandemic, we have seen a dramatic increase in animals with significant behavioral issues who have been transported into VT from other states by rescues that may or may not be located in VT. Some rescues are bringing in aggressive dogs and adopting them to Vermonters without telling them the dog's history. In many instances, when the dog shows aggression, and/or bites a family member, the rescue does not respond. Since the rescue where the dog came from is not willing to help, CVHS had been called. These are not isolated incidents, and this is a significant public safety issue.

Some rescues are also bringing in animals with health issues and adopting them to families without disclosing that they will need veterinary care. This results in significant vet costs for a Vermont family who expected (and rightly so) their new pet would be healthy. In addition to cost, we know of at least one instance where a child contracted ringworm from a cat the family adopted, and the illness was not disclosed prior to adoption. Again, this is a risk to public safety.

We are also aware of certain rescues who would be classified as "hoarders" – too many animals living in terrible conditions. Because our current system is broken, there is no way to shut down these rescues and save the animals who are neglected and suffering. We desperately need state-level oversight of rescue groups and shelters. None are held to any animal or public health standards. Both Maine and New Hampshire have such standards. H.626 and S.292 set minimum requirements for care and housing of animals as defined by veterinarians who specialize in animal shelter medicine.

An example of how our system is broken happened in July 2022, when private citizens tried to get action to rescue baby goats who were neglected and starving in Charlotte. Because our system is so fractured, these private citizens were passed around to various agencies who all told them these goats were not in their purview. It took two weeks to finally get a response, and during that time more baby goats suffered and died. VT Digger wrote an excellent story describing the situation and made this valid point:

*"Yet while the animals' plight was in full public view, neighbors said getting officials to respond in a timely manner proved a frustrating task that resulted in more goat deaths — and exposed a deficient state system for reporting concerns of animal neglect."*

The current system in Vermont is scattered across many agencies, which is inefficient, ineffective, and has little or no accountability.

I firmly support the recommendations of both the Vermont Animal Cruelty Investigations Advisory Board and Vermont Department of Public Safety to establish a dedicated division of state government to manage and enforce an updated suite of animal welfare laws.

I support H. 626, An Act Related to Animal Welfare. It is essential that we update our laws for the safety and well-being of animals and Vermonters.