

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.

I am writing to support the need for funding the Division of Animal Welfare as proposed in H.626 and S.292, An Act Relating to Animal Welfare. Vermont currently has a system where responsibility for supporting and enforcing animal welfare law is fragmented across many agencies in our government. We saw this system fail last summer 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 local and state 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.”*

A centralized Division of Animal Welfare is desperately needed. In late 2022, animal cruelty investigations were taken over by the Warden Service. CVHS has been involved in various investigations since and we applaud the Warden Service for their hard work and diligence. However, because our system is so broken, the Warden Service is forced to deal with multiple agencies, none of which have real accountability. We have a professional and extremely competent department in the Warden Service, but their ability to effectively do their jobs is hamstrung by our system. The proposed Division of Animal Welfare would provide critical resources and support to the wardens.

Our fragmented system is by its nature inefficient and ineffective. We currently have many individual agencies that are funding bits and pieces of the work. That funding is not used in the most effective way, and so in the long run costs more. By bringing everything together in a single, central Division, we are not making government bigger. These duties and responsibilities already exist. What we are asking for is smarter, more efficient government.

Thank you.