

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in person on Tuesday, February 13, 2024. I wanted to follow-up with additional written testimony.

My name is Pamela Krausz and I am the founder and executive director of VT-CAN! Spay/Neuter Clinic in Middlesex. I am also on the Vermont Humane Federation board.

I have been involved in animal welfare for over thirty years and have seen firsthand the limits of our current system, especially since opening VT-CAN! in August of 2008.

I believe that the current inefficient and fragmented system incurs greater costs than the funds being sought for this program. While the cost for a new Animal Welfare Division may seem daunting, it could be argued that the state already incurs those costs, but in a piecemeal approach.

I have been involved with egregious cruelty cases and witnessed numerous situations that needed to be investigated but were not due to lack of resources. I was also very naïve about rescue organizations transporting animals into Vermont from other states, especially from the south. Once VT-CAN! opened, rescues began contacting us to alter the animals they transported to Vermont. I was horrified by what I saw: dangerous and sick animals, too many “less adoptable” dogs such as pit bull types that are already disproportionately represented in our shelters, and questionable care given by some rescue groups.

I want to speak to the need for funding the Animal Welfare Division as proposed in H.626 and S.292, An act relating to animal welfare. Here is the current budget wording from the Department of Fish & Wildlife:

In late 2022, the Warden Service took on significant, new responsibilities related to animal cruelty investigations in response to the Governor’s Comprehensive 10-Point Public Safety Enhancement & Violence Prevention Action Plan, freeing up State Police resources for high priority response activities. Due to the significant workload associated with animal cruelty cases, there is a need for an additional Warden to add capacity to the Warden Service. For perspective, since September 2022, Wardens have handled over 200 animal cruelty calls for a weekly average of just over three per week. Many of these calls are time consuming and involve issues around mental health/hoarding. During this time, Wardens have seized (or had voluntarily surrendered) approximately 50 animals, including cats, dogs, horses, goats, pigs, cows and other various animals. The SFY25 includes \$299K in general fund to support the Warden Service in providing these labor-intensive services, including the cost for a position as well as \$181K in operating funds to be used, in part, to cover currently unbudgeted costs related to animal boarding and veterinary treatment resulting from the warden’s investigations.


This description and why money allocated to animal cruelty investigations is needed are spot-on. However, allocating this money to the new Animal Welfare Division is a better use of funding. It will help not only the Warden Service, but law enforcement, animal control officers, humane societies, the Department of Agriculture, and the general public.

Much of what I have seen is directly attributable to the lack of a cohesive statewide program with enforceable measures to protect animals and the general public. The absence of a central agency that directs Vermonters and other agencies on animal welfare puts everyone at risk. Our current piecemeal approach to enforcing animal welfare measures, costs adopters, nonprofits, local and state government agencies, and Vermont taxpayers thousands of dollars. The emotional toll lingers for years, with plummeting morale, reduced capacity, and unwillingness to help further.

In addition to monetary and morale costs, medical costs are mounting and lives could be lost. Dangerous dogs are being adopted into our communities. People are being bitten, and the worst injuries are to small children. I fear it is just a matter of time before the unthinkable happens and a child is killed. The state could be among those named in the resulting lawsuits.

If this proposed \$299,000 is apportioned to the new Animal Welfare Division, added to the projected revenue from fees proposed in H.626/S292, a significant portion of the cost for the new Division would be covered. When the existing costs from our fractured and piecemeal approach are combined with the huge nonmonetary costs previously mentioned, it is clear that Vermont cannot afford *not* to fund an Animal Welfare Division.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pamela A. Krausz".

Pamela Krausz
Brookfield, VT