

April 30, 2024

Good afternoon. My name is Jackie Stanley and I'm the current president of the Vermont Humane Federation, and I'm also the executive director of Lucy Mackenzie Humane Society in West Windsor, VT. I'd like to thank Chairperson Hardy and the entire committee for the invitation to testify in regards to bill H.626. This is a bill that I believe is vitally important to the future of animal welfare in Vermont, and H.626 is fully supported by myself and the entirety of the Vermont Humane Federation. For context, the Federation is a membership organization comprised of animal welfare professionals throughout Vermont. We are primarily a networking organization that is committed to expanding awareness of animal welfare issues and needs throughout the state.

The VHF member shelters are:

- Addison County Humane Society, known as Homeward Bound in Middlebury,
- Central Vermont Humane Society in East Montpelier
- Franklin County Humane Society in Saint Albans
- Humane Society of Chittenden County in South Burlington
- Lucy Mackenzie Humane Society in West Windsor
- North Country Animal League in Morristown
- Rutland County Humane Society in Pittsford
- Springfield Humane Society in Springfield
- Windham County Humane Society in Brattleboro

My career in animal welfare began in 2008 at Lucy Mackenzie Humane Society, which is one of the oldest continually operating Humane Societies in the country. I began as a volunteer, and I've held multiple positions within the organization since then, including that of an animal care provider, adoption counselor, shelter manager and director of development. I was promoted to executive director in 2019. In that same year, I became a member of the Vermont Humane Federation, and for the past two years, I have served as their president.

I wanted to focus my testimony on three key elements of this bill, and to offer my perspective as a sheltering professional.

I feel it's important to note that the experiences and views that I'm going to share aren't unique to me or to Lucy Mackenzie -they are shared amongst all responsibly-operated shelters and rescues in Vermont, including the member shelters of the Vermont Humane Federation.

**The first element of the bill that I would like to address is that H.626 would authorize and fund a new position of Director of Animal Welfare within the Department of Public Safety in order to develop a comprehensive plan for the development, implementation, and enforcement of the animal welfare laws of the State.**

I can speak from experience as to how vital this need is. In 2014, Lucy Mackenzie became the lead organization in a cruelty case that led to the seizure of 23 Arabian horses from a Woodstock VT farm. As with most shelters in the state of Vermont, Lucy Mackenzie deals primarily with cats and dogs, operates with a limited staff, and did not have the capacity to deal with a rescue on such a scale. However, we answered the call because we had no other choice but to do so. We could not turn a blind eye to these severely neglected and malnourished animals. Thankfully, through the generosity of our horse-loving community and pure determination and commitment, we were incredibly fortunate to be able to save the lives of all 23 horses. However, our ability to financially sustain our operations was tenuous at best and this rescue could've brought our century-old animal shelter crumbling to its knees. And, this is just one example.

It's our hope that this amended version of H. 626 will lead to a fully operational Division of Animal Welfare, and the appointment of a Director of Animal Welfare to oversee and support animal cruelty investigations statewide. A rescue like the one I described could have been very different, and the emotional, physical and financial toll that was felt by Lucy Mackenzie during this time could have been avoided.

**Secondly, there is a critical need for state oversight of rescue groups and shelters.**

While we're disappointed that there is currently no state agency willing to oversee the operations of shelters and rescues, which provide critical animal protection and public health services to their communities, we're hopeful that a fully functioning Division of Animal Welfare can eventually fill this huge gap.

Currently, with no oversight or regulation of shelters and rescues in VT, the consequence is that unqualified individuals, no matter how well intentioned, can assume the ability to operate a quote-unquote rescue.

Throughout my time serving Lucy Mackenzie I have witnessed the aftermath of numerous such organizations who were simply not equipped, nor did they have the means to uphold the proper standards, of humanely caring for the animals. This is not unique to myself, or to Lucy Mackenzie - other legitimate, responsible shelters in the state of Vermont have also witnessed these situations and have been left to pick up the pieces. The Vermont Humane Federation, which is comprised of such responsible shelters, fully supports the need for oversight as detailed in Bill H.626.

**Next I'd like to address the critical need for creating a licensing structure within the Division to regulate the importation and quarantine of animals transported into Vermont for adoption, which bill H.626 addressed when it was introduced.**

The unregulated importation of companion animals into Vermont poses health, financial, physical, and emotional risks to Vermonters. It also contributes to animal neglect and suffering.

A delayed implementation date means delayed regulations for animal shelters and rescue organizations, but it also means delayed regulations for groups that import animals into

Vermont for adoption, which aren't referenced in H. 626's current version. We would love to see language added that takes this classification into account, which comes down to the two words "or imported."

**On page 4, line 2:**

***§ 3202a1.2b.1.G) recommended amendments to animal welfare statutes or rules, including standards of care for animals housed or imported by animal shelters or rescue organizations.***

The transport of out-of-state animals is a practice that has gone unregulated for far too long. All too often, these animals are adopted based off a simple picture that is seen online and they come with limited medical and behavioral records and information. This results in tremendous risk to both the animals and Vermonters. The likelihood of the adopter being ill-matched with the animal in these situations is far greater. These adopters are often left to their own devices when things go wrong because the original transport is unwilling or unable to take the animal back into their care. As a result, and in best case scenarios, adopters turn to their local shelters in order to surrender the animal. This then puts shelters in a compromising position, because without adequate records or information they are now potentially exposing their entire animal population to possible unknown diseases. It also leaves shelters then having to make the difficult decision of what the best outcome for the animal and public will be. With Bill H.626, we can ensure the safe importation and quarantine of animals into Vermont, averting such situations, and protecting adopters and animals alike.

**Lastly, the Vermont Humane Federation respectfully requests the committee consider amending the bill to include instructions and a deadline for collecting animal cruelty case data and costs statewide across all of the state agencies that perform animal cruelty investigations.** This is critical information for the new Animal Welfare Director to have in order to make recommendations to the legislature.

I'd like to wrap up my testimony by again thanking the committee, and all those who have worked tirelessly on bill H.626. I would also like to reiterate the relevance of this bill and its importance to the future of animal welfare in the state of Vermont. On behalf of the Vermont Humane Federation, I thank you for this opportunity.

Respectfully submitted,

Jackie Stanley  
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Executive Director, Lucy Mackenzie Humane Society