
This act summary is provided for the convenience of the public and members of the General Assembly. It is intended to provide a general summary of the act and may not be exhaustive. It has been prepared by the staff of the Office of Legislative Counsel without input from members of the General Assembly. It is not intended to aid in the interpretation of legislation or to serve as a source of legislative intent.

Act No. 118 (H.578). An act relating to penalties and procedures for animal cruelty offenses

Subjects: Crimes; cruelty to animals; humane and proper treatment of animals

This act expands the conduct that constitutes animal cruelty to include a broader definition of sexual conduct with an animal; knowingly possessing, filming, or distributing obscene visual images of sexual conduct with an animal; violating a court order not to possess, own, care for, reside with, have custody of, or work with animal; and knowingly refusing to comply with a court order to permit periodic unannounced visits by a humane officer. The act further expands the conduct that constitutes aggravated animal cruelty to include any sexual conduct with an animal when the conduct involves a minor. The act expands the sanctions a sentencing court may impose on a person convicted of animal cruelty and makes certain sanctions mandatory.

The act establishes deadlines for proceedings to permit civil forfeiture of an animal subject to cruelty and requires owners seeking to challenge a seizure to post security at the time of seizure to pay for the costs of care, which a court may reduce or waive on the basis of financial hardship. The act provides immunity to humane officers, animal shelters, and rescue organizations for actions taken in good faith reliance on forfeiture law, not including gross negligence or intentional misconduct. The act requires the Division of Animal Welfare to adopt rules for the receipt, management, and distribution of the security payments; authorizes the Animal Welfare Fund to accept and hold security payments; and authorizes the Director of Animal Welfare to make distributions and reimbursements from the Fund. The act requires the Director of Animal Welfare to propose to the General Assembly security amounts and payment schedules. The act sets a security amount for nonlivestock animals and livestock animals until legislation establishing the amount of the security and the payment schedule takes effect.

Effective Date: July 1, 2026