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For The Love of Dogs VT volunteer

My name is **Ally Judkins**. I am the **Animal Control Officer for the Town of Hyde Park**, the founder of **Paws of Promise**, and I am affiliated with **For the Love of Dogs VT Rescue**. I am submitting this testimony not only in a professional capacity, but as someone who lives this issue every day.

I am submitting this testimony because I am tired—tired of watching animals suffer while the system meant to protect them stands still, and tired of being told there is nothing that can be done when I know that is not true.

I see this issue from two sides: as an animal control officer and as someone deeply involved in animal rescue. I am the person who walks onto properties where animals are starving, freezing, living in filth, or left without medical care. I am also the person who then has to find somewhere for those animals to go, knowing full well that rescues are already full, underfunded, and overwhelmed. No matter which role I am in, the outcome is the same—animals are stuck waiting, and they suffer for it.

Under Vermont law, animals seized in cruelty and neglect cases can be held in legal limbo for months, sometimes longer. During that time, their lives are on pause. They cannot be adopted. They often cannot fully heal. They remain legally tied to the very people who harmed them. For animals who have already endured neglect or abuse, this extended waiting is not neutral—it is damaging.

What makes this even harder to accept is who pays the price. The owners responsible for the neglect are rarely required to contribute financially to the care of their animals. Instead, rescues, shelters, and municipalities absorb the cost—food, veterinary care, medications, staffing—day after day, month after month. I have watched rescues beg for donations just to keep seized animals alive, knowing that every dollar spent there is a dollar taken away from the next animal in need.

From the enforcement side, I have personally spoken with law enforcement officers and game wardens who have been told not to seize animals—even in clear, documented cases of neglect or cruelty—because there is nowhere for them to go and no funding to support their care. When owners refuse to surrender animals, those animals stay where they are. They continue to suffer, not because officers don't care, but because the system leaves them powerless.

This is the reality we are living in: animals remain in abusive situations because removing them creates a financial and legal burden no one is prepared to carry.

This is not a failure of compassion. Vermont is full of people who care deeply about animals. This is a failure of our laws to reflect reality.

We need legislation that requires owners to take responsibility—either by posting a bond to cover the cost of care within a short, defined timeframe, or by forfeiting their animals so those animals can move forward. We need to shorten the amount of time animals are held in limbo, waiting while their physical and emotional condition worsens.

Due process should not mean prolonged suffering. Accountability should not fall on rescues, shelters, and officers who are already stretched to their limits. And protecting animals should not depend on whether a nonprofit can afford to say yes.

If nothing changes, animals in Vermont will continue to suffer in silence, and the people trying to help them will continue to burn out, shut down, or be forced to look the other way. I do not believe that is what Vermonters want, and I do not believe it is what this legislature intends.

I am asking you—please—to stop accepting a broken system as inevitable. Create laws that can be enforced. Create a process that protects animals without punishing those who step in to save them. Give officers the ability to act, and give animals the chance to heal and move on.

They do not have a voice. This is ours.

Thank you for listening.