

**Animal Cruelty Investigation Advisory Board**  
**Letter to Senate Committee on Judiciary in support of H.578**

***Animal Cruelty Investigation Advisory Board***

*Erika Holm*, Central Vermont Humane Society – Chair

*Sally Adams, Esq.*, State’s Attorneys and Sheriffs Association – Vice Chair

*Isaac Merriam*, Department of Public Safety

*Thomas Scott*, Department of Fish and Wildlife

*Trevor Whipple*, Vermont League of Cities and Towns

*Jennifer Firpo*, Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council

*Mary McFaun*, Vermont Federation of Dog Clubs

*Pamela Brown, DVM*, Veterinarian

*JoAnn Nichols*, Humane Society of Chittenden County

*Dr. Kaitlynn Levine*, Agency of Agriculture

*Vacant*, Vermont Police Association

April 14, 2026

2016 Act No. 155, Section 1943 tasked the creation of an Animal Cruelty Investigation Advisory Board (ACIAB) for the purpose of reviewing Vermont’s existing systems for investigating and responding to animal cruelty complaints, and making recommendations to the Legislature regarding a streamlined, collaborative process that provides the best services to Vermont’s animals statewide.

Since 2017, the ACIAB has annually reported to the Legislature per its statutory mandate. The ACIAB’s past reports can be found [here](#). The ACIAB has consistently recommended a comprehensive plan to bring together the fragmented investigation functions throughout the state, to create consistency, equity, and find efficiencies, starting with creating a State division responsible for this oversight.

Our Board is in support of H.578, and the intent contained in the legislation to strengthen Vermont’s statutes in regards to the welfare of the animals of Vermont. As the legislation moves through the democratic process, you are hearing from experts in the variety of fields that encompass animal welfare, and while some language may still need work, we are in support of what this bill is working to achieve: stronger penalties for bestiality, revisions to seizure guidelines, and appropriate changes to the civil forfeiture process.

The pieces of this bill contain vital first steps toward achieving what the ACIAB has been asking the Legislature to put in place for the betterment of Vermont animals. While we would prefer a more comprehensive overhaul of Vermont's approach to cruelty investigations and overall animal welfare, we will continue to work with animal welfare organizations, advocates, state agencies, and legislators to keep the needed changes on the radar, and moving continually in the right direction.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this bill, and for working so diligently to improve the care of Vermont animals.

Respectfully submitted,

Erika Holm

Chair