

The Need to Reform CT's Animal Cruelty Laws

Desmond's Law: In 2016, CT moved to the forefront of progressive jurisprudence with passage of a Courtroom Animal Advocate Law (Desmond's Law - PA16-30). Agreement to bring expertise in animal cruelty into the court room to further the interest of justice was revolutionary. As enacted the law allows the court to appoint pro-bono attorneys or supervised law students to assist in the collection of information and offer recommendations on cruelty cases involving dogs and cats.



Desmond, a dog brutally killed by a domestic abuser in 2011.

CT's enactment of Desmond's Law started a movement. Today, multiple states, including New York, California, New Jersey and Illinois, are legislating similar initiatives and Maine enacted its own version in 2018. A notable omission, however,

is that the law only applies to cases involving dogs and cats. There have been highly publicized and significant animal cruelty cases involving other animals such as horses and rabbits. Although technically they have the discretion, judges have been reluctant to do so without clear direction from the legislature. A bill allowing courtroom advocates to be appointed for any animal at the "judge's discretion" would resolve the problem.

Animal Cruelty Reform: Unfortunately, CT has been less than "revolutionary" when it comes to its animal cruelty statutes. The statutes have not been reviewed in over 30 years, they have been added to periodically often creating redundant and inadequate

terminology that makes interpretations confusing and difficult to administer by law enforcement. Like any other aspect of the law, it is good practice to keep up with current thinking and trends in the field. As we tackle improving the law regarding cruelty to animals, we begin to tackle the foundational causes of other criminal action.

For many, animal cruelty can be seen as a simple misdemeanor, not an indication of a perpetrator's likelihood to commit other, oftentimes violent, crimes. But research in the past 20+ years clearly shows that taking a more serious look at these crimes is critical to address aggressive behavior towards humans.

- In 2001, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention reviewed the existing research and determined that nearly two-thirds of inmates who commit crimes of aggression might also abuse animals.
- A 2010 Chicago Police Department study "revealed a startling propensity for offenders charged with crimes against animals to commit other violent offenses toward human victims."
- A 2007 survey of women in domestic violence shelters indicated that 71% had partners who abused or threatened to abuse pets.
- In January 2015, the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System elevated animal cruelty to its own category in the system, to be tracked alongside crimes such as homicide and arson.

The statement from the National Link Coalition sums up best why animal cruelty should be taken seriously in the justice community: "**When animals are abused, people are at risk; when people are abused, animals are at risk.** Increasing awareness of the link is encouraging legislators, community agencies, and caring people to take action by giving greater importance to suspected animal abuse, knowing that they may be also preventing other forms of violence."