



AMERICAN HUMANE

Protecting Children & Animals Since 1877

October 22, 2009

Tiffany Frautschi
MS-FACT
P.O. Box 8286
Meridian, MS 39303-8286

RE: Support for MS-FACT Felony Animal Cruelty Effort

Dear Ms. Frautschi:

On behalf of American Humane, the nation's only non-profit organization dedicated to protecting both children and animals from maltreatment, we strongly support the Mississippi Fighting Animal Cruelty Together (MS-FACT) effort to spearhead a legislative initiative that would finally make maliciously killing, wounding, or injuring any dog or cat a first-offense felony in Mississippi.

It is time for Mississippi to join the 46 other states that have felony laws for aggravated abuse of companion animals. The strength of an animal cruelty law directly corresponds with how acts of animal abuse are investigated and prosecuted. Because Mississippi's current law penalizes the worst imaginable abuses against dogs and cats as mere misdemeanors with, at the very best, a maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment or a maximum \$1,000 fine, most of these heinous crimes are not taken seriously and are even sometimes altogether ignored.

This initiative is also a critical step toward safeguarding the welfare of humans, especially children. A growing body of research demonstrates The Link® between those who are cruel to animals and then progress toward human violence. Deliberate and brutal abuse of animals rarely occurs in isolated instances.

Numerous studies in psychology, sociology, and criminology have demonstrated that violent offenders frequently have childhood and adolescent histories of serious and repeated animal cruelty. The FBI has recognized the connection since the 1970s, when its analysis of the lives of serial killers suggested that most had killed or tortured animals as children. Other research has shown consistent patterns of animal cruelty among perpetrators of more common forms of violence, including child abuse, spouse abuse, and elder abuse. In fact, the American Psychiatric Association considers animal cruelty one of the diagnostic criteria of conduct disorder.¹

¹ American Psychiatric Association, American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - Fourth Edition, 2000.

Children who grow up in an environment where animal neglect is the norm live may become desensitized to the inhumane treatment of animals. A 2009 study recently found that individuals who witnessed animal cruelty were 8.14 times more likely to be perpetrators of violence. Witnessing animal cruelty was the biggest predictor of later violence by the witness. Overall, the study found that “[w]itnessing and perpetrating animal cruelty were predictive of family violence, with each increasing the odds of child abuse by 1/5 to 2 times.”²

Our office recently examined a copy of the bill drafted by MS-FACT and it is our hope that its language is implemented into the final version. We believe this initiative is sound, especially since the penalty language (maximum five year imprisonment and a maximum \$10,000 fine for each aggravated cruelty offense, with a reimbursement provision) is language taken verbatim from Section 97-41-15 of Mississippi’s animal cruelty code as pertains to maliciously killing, wounding, or injuring livestock.

We are encouraged that the draft language goes even further to allow the court to order convicted offenders to undergo psychiatric evaluation and subsequent treatment. As treatment of animal abusers is essential toward ending the cycle of violence and lowering recidivism rates, it is critical that the court order is *mandatory* instead of discretionary.

Additionally, recognizing the tragic issue of recidivism, we support the draft bill’s provision that allows the court to remove pets from the possession and control of convicted abusers. This provision—which also should be a *mandatory* order—is yet another critical means toward preventing further abuse from occurring, and toward ensuring that convicted animal abusers are fully rehabilitated prior to possessing any pet.

If successful, MS-FACT’s effort would send a solid statement that Mississippi does not tolerate intentional and egregious cruelty toward cats and dogs, and that the state is committed to toward preventing, investigating, and prosecuting the crime. American Humane believes is the duty of all citizens and entities concerned with protecting the welfare of Mississippi’s humans and animals to support this initiative.

Sincerely,

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² DeGue, S., DiLillo, D., *Is Animal Cruelty a ‘Red Flag’ for Family Violence? Investigating Co-Occurring Violence Toward Children, Partners, and Pets* (Journal of Interpersonal Violence, vol. 24, 2009, p. 1036-56.)