

# CONSIDER

## AN UP-CLOSE LOOK AT AMERICAN HUMANE'S PUBLIC POLICY WORK

### MISSISSIPPI FAILS TO BECOME 47<sup>TH</sup> STATE WITH A FELONY ANIMAL CRUELTY LAW

by Tracy Coppola, legislative analyst,  
American Humane

American Humane's Office of Public Policy advocates strongly for the passage of state bills that increase penalties for animal cruelty. For the welfare of both people and animals, the law must treat all acts of violence against animals in a way that accurately reflects the magnitude of these crimes. The strength of an animal cruelty law directly corresponds with how acts of animal abuse are investigated and prosecuted, as well as how seriously they are taken.

Despite the fact that intentional acts of cruelty pose a nationally recognized danger to communities, four states — Idaho, Mississippi, North Dakota and South Dakota — still lack laws that provide felony penalties for acts of the worst crimes committed against animals. (These crimes are usually categorized as acts of "aggravated animal cruelty.") This is why American Humane was honored to support local advocate group Mississippi Fighting Animal Cruelty Together (MS-FACT) this year as it attempted to pass Senate Bill 2623 (sponsored by Sen. Billy Hewes) to make Mississippi the 47th state with a felony animal cruelty law.

Specifically, SB 2623 would have made aggravated cruelty to cats and dogs a felony with a maximum five-year imprisonment and a maximum \$10,000 fine. In addition, the bill would have required courts to order the convicted offender to pay restitution to the owner of the animal(s) and to the shelters and enforcement agencies directly involved in the case. The court could also require psychological evaluation of the offender and necessary treatment. American Humane strongly favors this type of provision. Requiring courts to order

convicted animal abusers to undergo mental health evaluations and appropriate counseling reflects a commendable commitment toward confronting and preventing animal abuse. Prosecuting and convicting animal abusers is a first step toward a more humane and compassionate society, but treatment of animal abusers is essential to ending the cycle of violence and lowering the recidivism rate.

**Protect all nine lives  
with just one law.**

Senate Bill 2623 would make aggravated cruelty to dogs and cats a felony offense in Mississippi.

To find out how you can help pass this bill, visit [www.ms-fact.org](http://www.ms-fact.org).



SB 2623 would also have permitted courts to require the offender to forfeit his or her right to own any animal for a specified period of time. American Humane believes that removing pets from the possession and control of a convicted abuser is another critical means to prevent further abuse and ensure that convicted animal abusers are fully rehabilitated prior to possessing another companion animal.

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# ADOPT-A-CAT MONTH® IS COMING IN JUNE...AND IT'S GOING TO BE **HUGE!**

American Humane is partnering with The CATalyst Council to promote cat adoptions and proper lifetime veterinary care for cats during our 2010 Adopt-A-Cat Month in June.

Look for details on Adopt-A-Cat Month activities and resources at [www.americanhumane.org/aacm](http://www.americanhumane.org/aacm) in late April.

American Humane's Adopt-A-Cat Month® is co-sponsored by



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Mississippi has one of the weakest animal cruelty laws in the country. In fact, the Animal Legal Defense Fund recently ranked the state as one of 2009's "Five Best States to be an Animal Abuser." MS-FACT has said that, in Mississippi, torturing a defenseless dog or cat often carries the same penalty as stealing a DVD.

Despite an outpouring of support from American Humane's constituents, we were greatly disappointed that the Mississippi House Agriculture Committee refused to hear SB 2623. Although the bill passed the full Senate, it died in the House Agriculture Committee on March 2, the last day for Mississippi House and Senate committees to act on bills that passed the other chamber.

We are thankful for the thousands of Mississippi citizens who believed in this bill and fought for its passage. MS-FACT has committed to reintroducing it next year, and American Humane is committed to strongly supporting their efforts. On behalf of Mississippi's cats and dogs, we must never give up hope on passing this critical initiative!

Please monitor [www.americanhumane.org/advocacy](http://www.americanhumane.org/advocacy) and [www.ms-fact.org](http://www.ms-fact.org) for more information on addressing this issue in 2011.