

MISSISSIPPI PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION

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On behalf of the membership of the Mississippi Psychiatric Association (MPA), I am writing to express our support for the Mississippi Fighting Animal Cruelty Together (MS-FACT) task force and its legislative agenda to support a bill that would create a first-offense felony for anyone guilty of animal cruelty. MPA will work with you to help members of our Legislature better understand the plight of abused animals and why it is so important to be aware of what this type of behavior could foreshadow. Our parent organization, the American Psychiatric Association, considers cruelty to animals one of the diagnostic criteria for conduct disorder.

We applaud your leadership in drafting a bill that allows the court to order convicted offenders to undergo psychiatric evaluation and subsequent treatment. We feel this issue is not simply emotional but psychological in nature and action must be taken in our state to diffuse a person who would abuse an animal before a heinous action is taken toward a human being.

Mississippi should join the forty-six other states that have felony laws for aggravated abuse of companion animals. The current misdemeanor law is too weak with a maximum penalty of six months in prison or up to a \$1,000 fine. The proposed language making each offense punishable up to a maximum five year sentence and maximum \$10,000 fine per offense would discourage this type of violence and place our canine and feline populations on equal footing with our bovine population.

We look forward to helping educate our elected officials further on the issue of animal cruelty and likewise support the efforts of MS-FACT to eradicate abuse of animals.

Sincerely,

Angela A. Ladner
Executive Director
Mississippi Psychiatric Association