



Mississippi - Fighting Animal Cruelty Together (MS-FACT)

14 February 2010

Dear Sir or Madam:

I would like to take this opportunity to provide you with information about SB2623, which creates a felony statute for the malicious and aggravated torture or abuse of dogs and cats. The Mississippi Senate overwhelmingly passed SB2623 earlier this month and it is now before the House Agriculture and Judiciary B Committees.

This bill has been crafted to be a moderate, but effective resolution to an issue that has been debated in the MS Legislature for over a decade. It contains well-written exemptions for legitimate and incidental acts, while addressing clearly unjustifiable, deliberate and malicious acts of cruelty. This legislation has the full support of MS-FACT, a Mississippi grass-roots organization dedicated to enacting reasonable animal cruelty laws for dogs and cats. In the summer of 2009, MS-FACT initiated a statewide petition seeking supporters for a first offense felony animal cruelty law to protect dogs and cats, and has since accumulated over 25,000 signatures from Mississippi residents supporting such legislation.

This bill has the full support of numerous state agencies, associations, local law enforcement officials, prosecutors and others who understand and are concerned about the relationship between abuse of animals and abuse of vulnerable adults and children. You will see how this legislation will provide the law enforcement community with a tool to identify emerging violent offenders. In addition to the felony statute, the bill provides the opportunity for the court to order psychiatric evaluation and treatment for the abuser, restitution to the animal owner and restitution to the investigating law enforcement agency. For youthful offenders in particular, psychiatric treatment is our last opportunity to stop the destructive behavior of malicious animal abuse before it escalates to violence against people.

Highlights of the enclosed material:

- Mississippi is one of only four states, and the only southern state, without a felony statute addressing the worst acts of animal cruelty against dogs and cats.
- Animal cruelty is a predictor and indicator of violent crimes, domestic violence and child abuse. Serial killers and school shooters frequently have histories of abusing animals. Passing a felony animal cruelty law is a crucial step to ensuring safety for entire communities.
- Anti-cruelty laws act as a deterrent and means of punishment for those individuals who perpetrate the most heinous acts of cruelty against animals. They help protect innocent children and vulnerable adults from violent predators.
- Animal cruelty occurs in Mississippi, but because our current laws are weak, even the most shocking crimes against dogs and cats are only prosecuted as misdemeanors - or not at all.
- Mississippi's livestock and its agricultural community are currently protected by a first-offense felony animal cruelty statute (97-41-15), but dogs and cats are not included in this law.

The people of Mississippi want the aggravated maiming and torture of dogs and cats to be prosecuted fully in order to protect people from the violent individuals who perpetrate these crimes. Mississippi's existing animal cruelty laws related to dogs and cats are inadequate. The time to act is TODAY! Please support SB2623.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Frautschi
President, MS-FACT
www.ms-fact.org