

Judiciary Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-923

AN ACT CONCERNING REVIEW OF ANIMAL CRUELTY LAWS BY THE

Title: CONNECTICUT SENTENCING COMMISSION.

Vote Date: 3/29/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/12/2021

File No.: 424

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Judiciary Committee

Rep. Dorinda Borer, 115th Dist.,
Rep. David K. Labriola, 131st Dist.,
Rep. Nicole Klarides-Ditria, 105th Dist.,
Rep. Mitch Bolinsky, 106th Dist.,
Rep. David Michel, 146th Dist.,
Rep. Kathy Kennedy, 119th Dist.,
Rep. William A. Petit, 22nd Dist.,
Rep. Laura M. Devlin, 134th Dist.,
Sen. Heather S. Somers, 18th Dist.,
Rep. Patrick E. Callahan, 108th Dist.,
Rep. Greg S. Howard, 43rd Dist.,
Rep. Cindy Harrison, 69th Dist.,
Rep. Donna Veach, 30th Dist.,

Rep. Craig C. Fishbein, 90th Dist.,
Rep. Jason Doucette, 13th Dist.,
Rep. Lucy Dathan, 142nd Dist.,
Rep. Kenneth M Gucker, 138th Dist.,
Sen. James J. Maroney, 14th Dist.,
Rep. Kurt Vail, 52nd Dist.,
Rep. Mary Welander, 114th Dist.,
Sen. Alex Kasser, 36th Dist.,
Sen. Will Haskell, 26th Dist.,
Rep. Patricia A. Dillon, 92nd Dist.,
Sen. Saud Anwar, 3rd Dist.,
Rep. Jane M. Garibay, 60th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would require the Connecticut Sentencing Commission to review animal cruelty law penalties in other states and make legislative recommendations for changes to state law. Connecticut animal cruelty laws are insufficient and do not reflect the proven correlation between animal cruelty and escalating forms of violence. Connecticut is one of fourteen states which do not have any laws explicitly authorizing or mandating psychological evaluations for animal cruelty offenders. This bill would also direct the Sentencing Commission to make recommendations that increase sentencing and criminalization, if the recommendations are in line with other states or national trends.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

State of Connecticut, Department of Agriculture, Commissioner, Bryan P. Hurlburt; supports this bill stating that a review by the Sentencing Commission could enact changes to reflect the rapidly evolving field of animal welfare. It is also stated that the department requests inclusion in the review process because it has oversight of Animal Control Officers and enforcement of animal welfare laws.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Connecticut General Assembly, State Representative, Dorinda Borer; supports this bill stating that Connecticut's current law on animal cruelty CGS 53-247, does the bare minimum to prosecute those who harm animals. It is also stated that the latest report from the Connecticut Office of Legislative Research shows that in the past 10 years 80% of the approximately 3800 animal cruelty arrests were not prosecuted. An amendment was suggested to include: (1) require psychological evaluation, especially for youth who have been charged with animal cruelty; (2) ban on future possession of animals of convicted; (3) education for those involved in the criminal system regarding the link between animal cruelty and other crimes; (4) involve parties who have been studying these issues to collaborate on solutions with the Sentencing Commission; and (5) change the reporting date to January 2022.

Connecticut General Assembly, State Representative, Nicole Klarides-Ditria; supports this bill stating that this proposal is a crucial step in the right direction for our state to call on and reevaluate how we hold offenders accountable for instances of animal cruelty. It is also stated that researchers have found a direct correlation between cruelty towards animals and violence towards humans.

American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut, Interim Senior Policy Counsel, Kelly McConney Moore supports this bill but opposes increasing sentencing and criminalization. It is also stated that longer sentences do not have any significant deterrent effect and reduced sentences do not impact public safety.

Animal Legal Defense Fund, Senior Legislative Affairs Manager, Stephanie J. Harris; supports this bill stating that by enacting a law addressing psychological evaluations, the state would be preventing future crimes and protecting potential victims.

American Kennel Club, New England, Legislative Analyst and Community Outreach Coordinator, Attorney, Stacey Ober; supports this bill and requests that the Connecticut Department of Agriculture have a role in the process.

Connecticut Federation of Dog Clubs and Responsible Dog Owners, President, Laurie A. Maulucci; supports enforcement of laws and regulations that provide penalties for neglect or cruelty to animals. It is stated that the Department of Agriculture should take the lead role in reviewing animal cruelty laws rather than the Sentencing Commission.

Connecticut Votes for Animals, Executive Director, Jo-Anne Basile; supports this bill stating that current statutes are overlapping, at times contradictory, and lack adequate terminology. It

is also stated that an equally important reason for this review is to address the link between animal cruelty and other forms of violence.

The Humane Society of the United States, Connecticut Senior State Director, Annie Hornish; supports this bill stating that procedural outcomes of animal cruelty offenses in Connecticut from 2002 through 2018 yield concerning statistics. It is also stated that a study found over 70% over women entering domestic violence shelters reported that their partners had threatened, abused, or killed the family pet.

University of Connecticut, School of Law, Director of Animal Law Clinic, Jessica Rubin; supports this bill stating that the state's current laws relating to animal treatment do not offer a current or internally consistent framework. It is also added that the substitute language offered by Representative Dorinda Borer should be adopted.

Marlborough, Connecticut, Resident, Carol Phelps; supports this bill stating that the sentencing recommendations should not be solely in the hands of the Sentencing Commission as the members do not understand nuances of animal care.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Stated.

Reported by: Rose Hirschl

Date: April 7, 2021