

ISSUE BRIEF



Companion Animal Cruelty Laws

Background

Iowa ranks 49th in the nation for the effectiveness of its animal cruelty laws. Too often we see cases where the penalties don't seem to "fit the crime", due to lax enforcement, generous plea deals, and weak sentencing. A comparison of Iowa's laws with those of high ranking and neighboring states showed that Iowa needs to do the following:

- Improve definitions and establish clear standards of care
- Enhance offenses and penalties to better deal with situations of greater severity
- Provide for mental health evaluations and restrictions on future possession
- Provide for mandatory veterinary reporting and immunity along with other professional cross-reporting
- Address the link between animal abuse and later child abuse or other violent crimes



Improving Iowa's animal cruelty laws is about more than just increasing the penalties for neglect, abuse, and torture. There are three key aspects:

- Penalties – Animal cruelty is a crime and needs to be taken seriously. Iowa's penalties are weak and provide less room for county attorneys to negotiate a meaningful sentence that will result in a positive outcome.
- Mental Health Assistance – Some offenders need help but there are few provisions in Iowa's current laws
- Future Possession – We need to ensure animals will not be harmed in the future by known offenders.

Improved definitions help prosecutors and judges. Enhancements provide additional options for charging and sentencing.

Much still depends on law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges, but improving the laws will provide better tools for these officials to use to protect animals and help Iowa's communities.

Note this bill would explicitly not impact livestock as livestock cruelty is addressed in another chapter of the Iowa Code. Agricultural interests having nothing to fear from this bill.

Currently

A bill is currently being prepared and is expected to be introduced later this session.

Action

Encourage your legislator to support improving Iowa's cruelty laws when the bill comes before them.