



The Cat Fanciers' Association, Inc.

"World's Largest Registry of Pedigreed Cats"

Good Law is in the Wording

The early part of each year is the time when most state legislatures meet to consider hundreds, sometimes thousands of bills that might affect you and your animals in ways you might never have dreamed of. The time is now to gain an understanding of the animal issues in your own state so that you can be both an informed voter, and so that you can influence your state legislators, who can benefit from your informed input.

One of the issues seen most frequently in state legislatures for the past two or three years is that of animal cruelty and abuse. Most people are aware that some evidence exists that links cruelty to animals and violence against people. Most frequently seen in various state bills, some of which have been passed in to law, has been the movement to make at least some forms of animal cruelty a criminal felony.

Certainly animal lovers and their organizations such as CFA that promote the welfare of animals, do abhor animal cruelty. While CFA has traditionally not taken an active role in either supporting or opposing specific legislation addressing cruelty, some advice is in order:

- a. Just because the proposed legislation is purportedly an "anti-cruelty" bill or is intended "to punish animal abusers" does not mean that it is a well written or a desirable bill. Every state in the United States has an animal cruelty law, which is generally enforced at the local level by humane organizations and local police and courts. Read the existing law carefully. Some are antiquated and do need revision. Others need only to be properly enforced.
- b. "Animal cruelty" per se can be defined to involve much more than intentional torture or mutilation. It can involve actions that represent mere carelessness or ignorance that is better addressed by education and incentive-based programs than by criminal prosecution.
- c. As you read the proposed legislation, do so with the idea that the punishment should fit the crime. If the punishment is perceived by most reasonable people as too harsh, such as the cutting off of the hand of a thief, then chances are that the law will backfire and animal abusers will go unpunished because prosecutors will be reluctant to prosecute and judges and jurors will be reluctant to convict. By the same token, if the punishment is not severe enough, the intentional abuser will not be dissuaded from repeating his crime.

Anna Sadler, July 2001

To correspond with the CFA Legislative Committee, please email Legislation@CFA.org