

Catherine Simpson

From: Margaret Gadsden <winstonmom2004@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 18, 2015 4:56 PM
To: Rep. Liz Vazquez
Subject: HB 147 - Animals Protection/Release/Custody

Dear Representative Vazquez,

I want to thank you for sponsoring the bill HB 147 regarding cruelty to animals. I think that this is a very important bill and I particularly like the addition of the sections in regards to protecting animals in cases of domestic violence.

- (15) prohibit your abuser from removing, harming, or disposing of an animal owned or possessed by you, your abuser, or any other person living in your residence, or authorize you to remove an animal from the possession of your abuser;
- (16) grant you the exclusive care, custody, and control of an animal owned or possessed by you, your abuser, or any other person living in your residence; and other relief the court determines to be necessary

I have personal experience with this issue. In November of 2013 I fled from an abusive marriage with my dog, Winston. I stayed in the marriage, and in an increasingly dangerous situation, longer than I should have because I couldn't find a way to get both Winston and myself to safety. Leaving Winston behind simply wasn't an option. Once we finally did flee and get to a safe location, the home of my parents, I was able to get a protective order that granted me temporary ownership of Winston. What followed after that was a protracted battle in the courts in which Winston was deemed "chattel" and had to be assigned a monetary value so that there could be an equitable division of property. My former spouse didn't do this because he wanted Winston for himself, he had used Winston and was continuing to use Winston as a tool to manipulate, control and harm me. While any physical harm he caused was very limited, the psychological harm was extensive. The fight for Winston in the courts took six months and was expensive. Despite the record showing that there had been two emergency and one long term protective order awarded to me that included Winston for protection from harm.

So, thank you for supporting strengthening this bill. I think further strengthening could be done. I was lucky, I had a safe place for both Winston and I to go for help. People in similar situations to mine that don't have family or friends that they can stay with often endure more abuse to protect their pets. Winston is my dog, but he is also my baby boy. He has been through a lot with me and I could never cause him harm or allow another to harm him. I'm just so grateful there was a safe option that included us both. Please do all that you can to encourage your colleagues to support the passage of this bill.

Thank you for all of your hard work! Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
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Winston's Mom