

Alaska State Legislature

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SPONSOR STATEMENT HB 138

"An Act relating to cruelty to animals."

There is an unquestionable connection linking animal abuse and domestic violence. There is also credible evidence that individuals who practice violent acts against animals also present a danger to the public. Lets be honest, some people torture animals for amusement and fun. This activity is often seen associated with other serious crimes including drug offenses, gang activity, weapons violations, sexual assault and domestic violence—and can be one of the most visible parts of the entire history of antisocial behavior.

Studies in psychology, sociology, and criminology during the last 25 years have shown that violent offenders habitually have childhood and adolescent histories of serious and repeated animal cruelty. Even the FBI has recognized these connections since the 1970s when its analysis of the lives of serial killers suggested that most had killed or tortured animals as children. Criminal history often shows consistent patterns of animal cruelty previously existed among perpetrators of more widespread forms of violence, including child abuse, spouse abuse, and elder abuse. In fact, a leading Psychiatric Association considers animal cruelty one of the diagnostic criteria of conduct disorder.

Cruelty to animals is increasingly viewed as a significant issue by professionals in law enforcement and mental health—and certainly also the general public. Effective prosecution of animal abuse produces real benefits. It provides early and timely responses to those who are, or who are at risk of becoming, a threat to the safety of others. It provides an added tool for the protection of those who are victims of family violence. We cannot achieve a truly compassionate society, but we can do things that move us in that direction.

HB 138 strengthens animal cruelty laws while recognizing dog mushing as an Alaskan sport, allows for the humane destruction of dangerous animals as well as vermin and pests that threaten our structures and personal safety, and makes knowingly, deliberately, or intentionally inflicting severe and prolonged pain or suffering upon an animal a felony offence. Torture of an animal must be considered a felony if we are to do all we can to protect our children, elders and all of our citizens.