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David O. Wiebers, M.D.

February 1, 2010

Dear Legislator:

On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States (The HSUS), the nation's largest animal protection organization with more than 18,000 members and constituents in Alaska, I am writing to urge you to support S.B. 214, to make the worst types of animal cruelty a felony on the first offense.

Numerous studies over the last 25 years have demonstrated that violent offenders frequently have childhood and adolescent histories of serious and repeated animal cruelty. The FBI has recognized the connection since the 1970s, when its analysis of the lives of serial killers suggested that most had killed or tortured animals as children. These crimes are so serious that allowing offenders a second and third chance to commit their atrocities is irresponsible and dangerous to society.

Just last month, "machete murderer" Christopher Erin Rogers, Jr., was sentenced to 498 years in prison for his horrific crimes. Charges against Rogers included misdemeanor animal cruelty charges for brutally slashing the dog that intervened, saving Elann Moren's life. While there can be no comparison between crimes against animals and such horrific murders, Rogers' acts have been described as "one psychotic episode." The same tendencies that motivated Rogers' murders also drove him to attack the dog. Accordingly, when other individuals brutally torture or maim animals, that same tendency should not be allowed to go essentially unchecked until it happens, is witnessed, and is successfully prosecuted three separate times.

Forty-six states have enacted felony level penalties for the most malicious acts of animal cruelty. Alaska is alone in requiring a third offense to trigger the felony clause.

Passage of a first offense felony animal cruelty law is an essential initial step in halting the progression of violent crime—against humans as well as animals. Enactment of S.B. 214 would bring Alaska's cruelty code in line with the rest of the country, and would protect Alaskan communities from the very worst animal abusers.

Sincerely,

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*Celebrating Animals, Confronting Cruelty*