

Senate Unanimously Passes Montigny Animal Anti-Cruelty & Abuse Bill

Last night, the Massachusetts State Senate unanimously passed Senate Assistant Majority Leader Mark Montigny's legislation to strengthen protections against animal cruelty and abuse. The bipartisan legislation from Montigny's Rules Committee builds upon his longtime efforts to protect animal welfare and safety.

The bill, An Act to protect animal welfare and safety in cities and towns (PAWS II), was compiled as a result of findings from an animal advocacy task force report generated from the original 2014 PAWS act. Working with Senate Minority Leader Bruce Tarr (R-Gloucester), Senator Montigny has exercised his Chairmanship of the influential Committee on Rules to report and secure passage of the bill, which will prohibit sexual abuse against an animal; increase reporting of animal abuse; permit corporations to be charged with animal cruelty; prohibit the drowning of wildlife; discontinue the inhumane practice of automatically euthanizing animals seized from fighting situations; prohibit breed discrimination in homeowners and renters insurance; and require inspection of vacant properties for abandoned animals.

"Our commitment towards ending the cruel and inhumane treatment of innocent animals is steadfast, and today we have taken significant action to protect their safety and welfare," said Chairman Montigny, a longtime champion of animal welfare legislation. "There is zero tolerance for such despicable brutality and today's action by the Senate sends a clear message."

The bill encompasses several key components recommended by the

Animal Cruelty and Protection Task Force which was constituted under the original PAWS act. Task force members include; the Massachusetts District Attorneys' Association, State Police, Attorney General's office, the Animal Rescue League of Boston, veterinarians, the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and others.

Key components of the bill include provisions to:

- Ensure abuse is reported

Require animal abuse be reported by the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Elder Affairs, and the Disabled Persons Protection Commission. Adds animal control officers as mandatory reporters of child abuse, elder abuse, and abuse against disabled persons,

- Ensure efficient enforcement of animal control laws

Increase penalties in animal control laws that provide non-criminal penalties for abuse. Double the existing penalty of a \$50 fine for a second offence to \$100, and increased the \$100 penalty for a forth offense to \$500,

- Prohibit the drowning of wild and domestic animals

Declare that drowning of animals as a violation of law,

- Remove automatic killing of animals involved in animal fighting

Remove a requirement to automatically kill animals involved in animal fighting. This bill creates other options for these animal victims,

- Add animal crimes to the list of offenses that serve as the basis for a request for a determination of detention and or release upon conditions

Include the crimes of animal cruelty to serve as the basis for a request for a determination of detention and or release upon conditions,

- Prohibit discrimination against specific dog breeds

Prohibit insurance companies and housing authorities to refuse insurance coverage or housing with breed restrictions,

- Require abandoned animal checks in vacant properties

Property owners and landlords must check property for

abandoned animals within three days following a foreclosure or termination of tenancy.

Sponsors of the bill also point to a recent Massachusetts study which found that a person who has committed animal abuse is five times more likely to commit violence against people and four times more likely to commit property crimes.

The bill now moves to the House of Representatives for further consideration.