

Bill adds pets to restraining orders

By Renee Nadeau Algarin | Sunday, April 18, 2010 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Local Coverage

Advocates for domestic-violence victims and animals alike are pushing for a bill to include pets under restraining orders.

"It'll make it a lot simpler to make a complete separation between the batterer and the victim," said Thomas Flanagan, a law enforcement officer with the Animal Rescue League of Boston and former Boston cop of 32 years. "You're not going to have that bartering chip where they can lure them back and have a horrible retaliation."

House Bill 1499, filed by Rep. Peter Koutoujian (D-Watertown), would allow judges to include animals in restraining orders in cases of domestic abuse.

Anyone caring for the animals while the victim is in a shelter or seeking help also would be protected. Other states have passed similar laws, advocates said.

"It's recorded that people will often not leave their pets behind and will not seek safety. It really is a barrier," said Kara Holmquist, director of advocacy for the MSPCA. "By helping ensure the pet is OK, we're really helping people, too."

A study by the MSPCA and Northeastern University found that animal abusers were five times more likely to commit violence against a person. Up to 48 percent of victims either will not leave or will return to a violent relationship because they fear for a pet's safety, according to MSPCA data.

"I have personally prosecuted cases where the animal was used to abuse the children or the partner," said Koutoujian, a former Middlesex assistant district attorney. He said his priority is to protect human victims of violence through the bill. Holmquist and Flanagan said they are unaware of organized opposition to the bill.

"It can be one of many different tactics an abuser uses, it could be threats to harm animals to try to keep someone in a relationship they don't feel safe in," said Maureen Gallagher, a policy director at Jane Doe Inc., an advocacy group.

Melinda T., who did not want to her full name published, was in an abusive marriage for six years. She stayed the final two years because she feared for her 7-year-old beagle and 9-year-old tabby cat.

"I did have a restraining order at the time to protect myself and my daughter, but because the animals were not on the restraining order, I didn't have any legal way to show they were mine," she said.

About two months after she received a vacate order to get her abuser out of the family's home in 1993, Melinda went to police to report that he was stalking her. He retaliated by coming after her pets.

"He went into the house and he killed them," she said.

On April 13, 2009, Hull police responding to a domestic-violence call arrested Todd Craaybeek, who beat his girlfriend's 8-week-old Japanese chin, Pong, to death after the couple argued. Hull animal officer Deni Goldman said the animal abuse, for which Craaybeek is currently serving a year in prison, "speaks to the seriousness of animal abuse in domestic situations."

In another case last year, Montiero Green of Framingham was sentenced to 23 years for escalating domestic abuse, culminating in attempting to strangle his girlfriend.

He had previously beaten two dogs and killed a family cat.

"These perpetrators start out with the most innocent victim in the home and work their way up to people," Goldman said. "The idea behind this is showing this pattern and this link between animal cruelty and domestic violence."



Article URL: <http://www.bostonherald.com/news/regional/view.bg?articleid=1248041>