



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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Animals protected under changes to Family Abuse Prevention law *SB 616 addresses domestic violence victim's fears that pets will be harmed by abuser*

SALEM – Domestic violence victims that fear for the safety of their animal companions may find comfort with a bill passed this morning in the Oregon Senate. Senate Bill 616 will allow judges to include pets under domestic violence restraining orders. Twelve independent studies have reported that between 18 percent and 48 percent of battered women delay leaving abusive situations out of fear for the safety of their animals.

“This change may encourage some victims of domestic violence to seek help sooner,” said Senate Majority Leader Diane Rosenbaum (D-Portland), a chief sponsor of the bill. “Cruelty to animals can be a serious part of the cycle of family violence. The fear that something could happen to a loved animal can be paralyzing and prevent a partner from leaving an abusive relationship.”

Currently, Oregon’s statute on whether a judge can include an animal in a restraining order is ambiguous. SB 616 clarifies Oregon’s existing Family Abuse Prevention Law to ensure that all judges know that they are able to include animals in protective orders.

“This bill addresses the uncertainty in our current statute and lets our judges know that animals can be included in a protective order,” said Senator Floyd Prozanski (D-Eugene), member of leadership. “The need for this legislation has been well-documented. It is clear that many victims are afraid to leave an abusive relationship and leaving behind a loved animal that could be hurt or even killed makes the decision to leave even more difficult.”

The relationship between animal abuse and domestic violence is well-documented. In a Wisconsin study, 68 percent of battered women reported that their animals had been the target of violence. Of these incidents, 87 percent occurred in the presence of the victim in order to further intimidate and control them.

“A cherished pet can be an easy target for an abusive partner,” said Senator Jackie Dingfelder (D-Portland), who carried the bill on the floor. “Animal violence is strongly linked to person-on-person violence and it’s not surprising that some abusers use the threat of hurting a pet to scare a partner into staying.”

Oregon would join sixteen other states with laws protecting animals in domestic violence situations if SB 616 is passed. The bill now goes to the House for consideration.

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