



AKC Urges Support for PAWS Act to Protect Domestic Violence Victims and their Pets



In the most recent of several initiatives to recognize the canine-human bond and to protect pets and their owners, the American Kennel Club is urging support for legislation (H.R. 1258/S. 1559) that would protect the pets of victims of domestic violence.

The 2015 Pet and Women Safety Act (the 2015 “PAWS” act), sponsored by Congresswomen Katherine Clark and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Senators Kelly Ayotte and Gary Peters, would amend current federal domestic violence protections to include pets in protection orders for human victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and dating violence.

Under PAWS, a person who commits an interstate violation of a protection order would be subject to fines and/or imprisonment and restitution for veterinary care of a victim’s pet that was harmed as the result of an offense. It also creates an Emergency and Transitional Pet Shelter and Housing Assistance Grant Program to award grants for programs that provide assistance to victims of crimes related to stalking and domestic violence, and establishes that states should encourage the inclusion of protections against violent or threatening acts against the pet of the person in domestic violence protection orders. Finally, it also encourages states to expand their legal protections for the pets of domestic violence victims.

Numerous studies and feedback from law enforcement officers indicate that a significant percentage of domestic violence situations also involve threats of, and outright abuse of pets. Studies have

shown that nearly half (48%) of women delay leaving an abusive situation out of concern for their pet and 70% of victims report their abuser threatened, injured or killed their pet. Sadly, many abusers often use maltreatment or threats of abuse against pets as leverage to prevent victims from fleeing abusive relationships. In one study, 25% of the participants reported that they returned to an abusive relationship out of concern for their pets.

Despite the frequent occurrence of pets being used as pawns in abusive relationships, few domestic violence shelters have programs to accommodate domestic violence victims who wish to seek shelter for themselves and their pets.

The AKC has been a leader in recognizing the value of protecting victims by also assuring the safety of their pets, and in 2010 es-

tablished the AKC Women’s Shelter Grant Program. This program provides grants from the AKC Humane Fund to domestic violence shelters and related organizations to assist them in setting up programs to accept victims and their pets. To date, the AKC Humane Fund has

distributed nearly 100 grants to assist domestic violence organizations that accommodate victims and their pets.

The AKC is also pleased to advocate and work with shelters to raise awareness about the connection between victims and their pets, and ways that shelters can accommodate victims’ pets. To learn more about the AKC Humane Fund program, visit www.akchumanefund.org.

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