

Montana Bill Targets Companion-Animal Hoarding

Measure seeks to establish penalties, rehabilitation for violators.

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A proposed Montana law would impose fines and penalties for possession of 10 or more companion animals kept in "severely overcrowded" conditions. Montana legislators are scheduled to hear a proposed measure that would add companion-animal hoarding to existing state cruelty laws. The measure, Senate Bill 221, establishes penalties and rehabilitation for companion animal hoarders.

A public hearing is set for March 11 before the House Judiciary Committee.

Sponsored by state Sen. Mitch Tropila, SB 221 states a person is guilty of "companion animal hoarding" if all of the following occur: Possession of 10 or more companion animals or household pets. Failure or inability to provide the necessary care for animals. Confining animals in a "severely overcrowded" environment.

"Companion animal or household pet" is defined as "a domesticated cat, dog, bird, ferret, rabbit or other domesticated animal normally maintained in the residence or on the property of the owner or person who cares for the domesticated animal." The proposed rule does not apply to purebred animal breeding facilities or facilities for animals related to sanctioned endurance races.

Under SB 221, anyone found guilty of companion-animal hoarding would be fined an amount not to exceed \$2,500, be sentenced to the department of corrections for a term not to exceed two years, or both. In addition, the convicted person must undergo a psychological or psychiatric examination and treatment when considered appropriate by the court.

The state Senate passed the bill on its third reading by a vote of 33-17.