

Animal Abuse Cross-Reporting Law Sought in Illinois

Legislation aims to help abused cats, dogs and people.

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Proposed legislation would help state agencies share information about animal abuse and family violence. State agencies that work together and share information about cat and dog abuse as well as family violence are better able to help victims. That's the idea behind a bill designed to make animal abuse cross-reporting a law in Illinois.

The bill, SB 2851, passed the Illinois Senate and arrived in the House in April, where it was referred to the Rules Committee. Sen. Linda Holmes, D-Aurora, a sponsor of the bill, says it's a good concept because of the link between child and animal abuse.

"Research has shown that when child abuse and neglect are present in a home with animals present, animal abuse also tends to occur," Holmes said. "The more eyes and ears that can act as mandated reporters and watchdogs of neglect and abuse, the quicker unfortunate situations like these can be corrected."

A survey of pet-owning families with substantiated child abuse and neglect found that animals were abused in 88 percent of homes where child physical abuse was present, according to the American Humane Association.

Bill sponsor Sen. Don Harmon, D-Oak Park, says this presents an opportunity to gather data from professionals that will help officials detect and respond to cases of animal abuse and child abuse.

"Animal abuse by itself," he said, "is a serious issue, and it often leads to child abuse or other domestic abuse."

The legislation calls for animal control officers and humane investigators with reasonable cause to suspect that a child is being abused or neglected to immediately make a written or oral report of the suspected abuse to the Department of Children and Family Services. In turn, Department of Child and Family Service investigators would be required to report suspected animal abuse or neglect to the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Animal Welfare.

Those that participate in good faith in the reporting or investigation of animal abuse or neglect are provided confidentiality under the bill. For more information, visit the Illinois General Assembly website.