

## Cat Owner Pleads Guilty to Animal Cruelty Charge

**An 83-year-old woman who is mentally ill and had 493 cats has been charged with misdemeanors, lawyer says.**

Ruth Knueven agreed to plead guilty Wednesday to a misdemeanor charge of animal cruelty. In exchange, prosecutors withdrew four additional misdemeanor charges relating to the 493 cats she was keeping, both dead and alive, in her Mount Vernon, Va., home and her daughters townhouse in Burke, Va., reports the Washington Post.

The 83-year-old woman, who had been declared an unfit pet owner in July, was suffering from mental illness, according to her attorney Jonathan D. Frieden. He told General District Court Chief Judge Donald P. McDonough Wednesday that his client is undergoing treatment for obsessive-compulsive disorder, which he says led her to start hoarding cats when a neighbor began feeding strays.

Taking into account Knuevens clean criminal record and mental condition, McDonough suspended his original sentence of 360 days in jail. He ordered Knueven to pay \$500 of a \$2,500 fine, and remain on active probation for one year.

The court clearly understands that this behavior is undertaken initially in the spirit of generosity and care, however misguided, McDonough says, These are very difficult cases.

Posted: Dec. 16, 2005, 3p.m. EST