

California Governor Signs Bill Protecting Pets from Domestic Violence

The new legislation allows the courts to include pets in restraining orders.

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In an effort to protect pets who get caught in the middle of domestic violence battles, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed Senate Bill 353 into law this week, allowing judges to include pets in domestic violence protection orders.

The bill was sponsored by State Senator Sheila Kuehl and allows the courts to order the respondent to stay away from the animal as well as grant the petitioner exclusive care of the pet.

"I'm really happy that it passed," Kuehl stated. "There's been a lot of recognition that many times batterers use threats and violence against the family pets to maintain power and control over their victims—as well as threatening the pets of their children, most of whom don't even know this is happening."

Violation of the protection order would be punishable as a contempt of court charge, a misdemeanor. The new legislation will be effective Jan. 1, 2008.

"I hope it'll protect family pets from this kind of violence that so many of them are put through," Kuehl said, "and I also hope that it'll help the victims to be able to have the authority of the court behind them in taking possession of the pets—and keeping the batterer away from them."

Research shows that 25 to 40 percent of domestic violence victims do not leave their abusers because they're concerned about what will happen to their animals, and 71 percent of pet-owning women in shelters reported that a pet had been threatened, injured or killed by their abuser, according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA).

California law enforcement officials received 181,362 domestic violence calls in 2005 (the most recent year data was available), according to the California Department of Justice.

California joins Illinois, Maine, Vermont, New York and Connecticut in implementing legislation that protects pets from domestic violence. Several other states are considering similar measures.

--Heidi Hatch, Associate News Editor for CatChannel.com