

Animal abuse reform to protect our beloved pets.

Hoosiers love their pets. We see them as extended members of our family, however current state law sees them as property. This means not only is it easy for those who abuse the creatures who love us the most and get away with it but it also makes it almost impossible for us to defend them when someone is stealing or even hurting them.

Throughout my journey I have spoken to hundreds of Hoosiers who believe this should change, and I must say I fully agree with them and believe all animals who pose no threat to the public should be protected and offenders be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law possible.. I propose a massive update to our current legislation to address these concerns.

Some of the things I propose are.

Upgrade Offense Classifications and Penalties

Make all first-time intentional abuse a felony: Currently, only certain acts of animal cruelty are felonies on the first offense.

Indiana does have a few acts that are charged as felony for first time offense such as torture or mutilation, animal fighting, cruelty in presence of a minor, and repeat neglect (which doesn't sound like a first time offense if its repeat)

However, there is a list of charges that DON'T fall under felony for first time offense which I believe should such as starving or abandoning on the street, leaving outside in extreme conditions (such as flooding, fire, sub zero temps, and extreme heat with no shelter.), hoarding animals in inadequate conditions, and intentionally harming wild or stray animals.

I believe we should expand the first time offenses to felonies of the situations I mentioned.

Increase penalties for repeat offenders: Establish escalating penalties for individuals with prior animal abuse convictions.

Currently you can be a repeat offender and it's a level 6 felony punishable with a fine and up to 2.5 years in jail. The same penalty gets applied if you continue to repeat the offense multiple times in a short period of time. I believe that level 6 should be first time felony offense and as you repeat the offense (with convictions) it should upgrade the charge to level 5, then level 4, and so on. Repeat offenses deserve increase in penalties.

Remove loopholes for "property damage" defenses: Treat animals as sentient beings rather than property in abuse cases.

This is a topic that many Hoosiers I spoke to displayed the most concern. We do not see our beloved animals as property but as living, loving, and even protectors of the family. We believe that the laws should reflect the love that our animals have for us.

By removing the title of “property” and labeling them as sentient beings with the ability to breath, feel pain, love and protect, then we also give our selves legal means to protect them the same way they would protect us. The title of sentient being along with making more situations of clear abuse automatic felonies that would also have made it possible for Elkhart county DA to prosecute the Jayco employees who put those cats in the trash compactor instead of dropping charges.

Expand Legal Definitions and Protections

Ensure protections apply not just to companion animals but also to livestock, strays, and wildlife when appropriate.

We must work not to just protect our companions, but also livestock, strays, and even wildlife. The reason we include all animals is for a variety of reasons. The reason we protect our companions is self-explanatory, but lets look at livestock. Livestock must be protected as well because the way we treat our animals actually effects the quality of the goods we receive from them.

When looking at livestock we get a wide range of goods from consumable food and drinks (various types of milk, meat, cheese) as well as things like wool and fur for fabrics which make clothes, bedding, upholstery, etc...

Many studies have shown the quality of our goods received from animals is tied to the quality of care they receive. If an animal is beaten, neglected, starved, or malnourished that can bring us inadequate meat, milk, cheese that is not healthy for consumption. These complications come from disease transition due to lack of veterinary care as well as the other extreme of overuse of antibiotics making them antibiotic resistant which is a huge public safety hazard, as well as the decline in milk production as cows under duress produce drastically less.

Neglect and abuse can also bring us subpar and even unusable material for fabrics. These complications can bring problems obviously not just for the public but for the producers as well making it harder for them to sell their goods on the market as consumers uncover abuse they will expose the abuse and demand wholesalers to buy from more ethical producers.

Broaden definitions of abuse: Expand the definition of cruelty to include hoarding, neglect, psychological abuse, and exposure to extreme weather without shelter.

I understand some species of animals and even some breeds of common house animals can tolerate and even enjoy different conditions. Some are bred for cold and some are bred for hot, but its important that we never have pour animals in conditions they are not genetically designed for.

We must always make sure that we do not over crowd places with insufficient space or inappropriate environment. We must make sure animals are never willfully neglected to the point malnutrition begins or they aren't harming themselves or others, and we must take into account the mental wellbeing of our animals as well.

The mental well being of your animals are important because that determines their entire behavior. This is crucial especially when dealing with animals who came from previously abusive homes. The past abuses an animal received plays a large role because they have been taught not to trust people. The way we counteract abuse is through love. I spent 9 years working with my aunt with AFRP (animal friends rescue project) taking care of foster animals from abusive house holds as well as shelters about to euthanize them who called us as a last resort to save them. Through those 9 years we managed to rehabilitate dozens of abused scared and even aggressive animals into some of the sweetest loving protecting creatures I have ever seen.

Address tethering and confinement: Prohibit inhumane chaining and require adequate outdoor shelter with clear, enforceable standards.

Animals love spending time outside and I never want to discourage anyone from giving their furry friend some fun in the sun, but we have to make sure its safe. Long term tethering and confinement can cause injuries like broken neck and imbedded collars.

I believe that enacting a tether limit would be beneficial as well as requiring a small shelter to protect from the extreme weather such as heat and rain and wind. The time would be debated but I believe between 2 and 4 hours with a shelter for condition changes as well as access to food and water would reduce a lot of the accidents we see from tethering. Places like Evansville and Indy have taken steps themselves to pass their own limitations but nothing has been enacted by the state level yet.

Improve Enforcement and Reporting

Mandatory reporting by veterinarians and professionals: Require vets, animal groomers, and others to report suspected abuse.

Indiana currently does not require veterinarians to report suspected abuse, while we do have immunity for those who choose to report it. I feel since they have the ability, and the immunity, they should also have the required duty. The same way teachers and doctors have to report child abuse I feel the same should be for veterinarians, groomers, and breeders if they believe a client is going to partake in animal abuse.

Stronger oversight of shelters and breeders: Increase regulation and inspection of animal breeders, pet stores, and shelters.

I believe all breeders regardless of size should follow the same regulations as the bigger breeders. Currently in Indiana only breeders with more then 20 unspayed females are regulated under IC § 15-21 Indiana's breeding regulations. This isn't to target smaller breeders, it's to ensure we have a standard

across the board to protect all parties involved, the client, the breeder, the animal, and the communities these animals will be rehomed to.

We need to also improve our licensing process by including, annual inspections as a condition of renewal, proof of veterinary care and vaccination, limits on breeding frequency (to prevent overbreeding), and mandatory microchipping or recordkeeping, all of which is currently not required

Create a state animal cruelty database: Track animal abusers to prevent them from owning pets again (like a "Do Not Adopt" list).

The same way we have a sex offender registry (which does have some issues that should be improved, we should also enact a database for animal abusers who are prohibited from adopting due to history of abuse. This isn't a new idea as Sen JD Ford of senate district 29 which covers Boone, Hamilton, and Marion counties proposed this in 2019 but the bill was not passed into law.

Increase Resources and Training

Specialized animal cruelty investigation units: Fund and train officers to investigate animal abuse properly.

Court-appointed animal advocates: Allow third-party advocates to represent animal interests in court proceedings (used in Connecticut and other states). This would be done in conjunction with declaring our companions as sentient beings. The same way we have child advocates for the courts we need the same for our fur babies. An advocate who specializes in animals such as behavior, physical health, mental health, and environments to be their voice, all so the courts can have adequate information when ruling on cases involving animals.

Public education campaigns: Promote responsible ownership and encourage reporting abuse.

As much as we all love our pets we have to understand there is always more to learn to make sure they have a long, healthy, happy life. this information comes from not just having personal experience but investing in making sure the information reaches the public. This can be done through state run PSA messaging as well as working with non-profit organizations to increase their messaging for proper animal care, as well as spotting signs of abuse and the appropriate authorities to report to.

Encourage Rehabilitation Where Appropriate

Court-ordered counseling and bans: Require animal abusers to undergo psychological treatment and prohibit future animal ownership.

Studies have shown psychopaths and serial killers never start with humans they start with animals. In an effort to catch the early signs of psychopathy its vital we evaluate those who commit heinous acts against animals. They should be evaluated by mental health experts and barred from ever adopting again.

Diversion programs for minors or low-level offenses: Use educational alternatives for younger or first-time offenders when appropriate, but only if animals are removed and future ownership is banned.

Instead of traditional prosecution, minors accused of low-level cruelty (neglect, mishandling, or minor injury) could be referred to a restorative or diversion-based program, including:

Animal empathy courses

Taught by humane societies or vets, these teach compassion and responsibility toward animals.

Mandatory community service with animal shelters

Hands-on, supervised work can build understanding and correct behavior through direct exposure.

Mental health screening

Many children who harm animals show signs of trauma or behavioral disorders; therapy can prevent recurrence.

Studies show that early cruelty to animals is often a warning sign for future violence known as the “Link” between animal abuse and human violence.

Strengthen Community and State Partnerships

Coordinate with animal welfare groups: Work with local and national organizations (like the Humane Society or ASPCA) for better enforcement and training.

Secure grant funding: Apply for federal and private grants to fund enforcement, education, and shelter care.