

## STATE OF RHODE ISLAND



Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals

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March 4, 2025

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Sr., Chair  
House Committee on Judiciary  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

### **RE: 2025 – H 5128 An Act Relating to Animal and Animal Husbandry – Cruelty to Animals**

Dear Chair Craven:

I am writing regarding **H 5218**, which makes any offense under this statute that could result in the death of an animal punishable by up to 3 years in prison, a fine of at least \$1,000, or both, for each offense.

BHDDH concurs that the abuse, neglect of animals requires appropriate judicial response. While BHDDH fully supports efforts to prevent animal abuse, this bill as currently drafted does not consider the complex behavioral health conditions which frequently underlie animal abuse. Behavioral health disorders that directly contribute to the mistreatment or neglect of animals should be addressed by the alternative of appropriate behavioral health treatment. Such treatment would have as its goal the alleviation of the condition(s) that has resulted in the allegations of abuse and/or death of an animal from abuse. Imprisonment or substantial fines will not serve as a deterrent or change the behavior of an individual whose harmful actions with respect to animals are solely due to a behavioral health condition.

A comprehensive mental health assessment conducted by a licensed mental health professional may result in the development of an appropriate intervention plan involving the coordinated efforts of multiple community-based behavioral healthcare and other service providers.

Staff within the Division of Behavioral Health at BHDDH would be happy to participate in efforts to develop an evidence-based response model that accommodates concerns about the abuse of animals.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation.

Sincerely,

Richard Leclerc  
Director

cc: Honorable Members of the House Committee on Judiciary  
The Honorable David A. Bennett

Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House  
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy