



March 3, 2025

RE: House Bill 5926

Dear Chairman Craven and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

As the advocacy voice of the responsible pet care community, the Pet Advocacy Network represents the interests and expertise of retailers, companion animal suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, pet owners, and others involved in the many aspects of pet care across the United States. Our association promotes animal well-being and responsible pet ownership, fosters environmental stewardship, and ensures healthy pets' availability through our local, state, and federal work. In addition, we routinely advocate for legislative and regulatory proposals to protect the health, safety, and availability of companion animals.

On behalf of the responsible pet care community, **we ask that you vote NO on House Bill 5926, which establishes a legal cause of action for pet owners to seek noneconomic damages if their pet is seriously injured or killed due to another person's unlawful and intentional or negligent actions.**

As representatives of those who serve and support pets and pet owners, we know that the human-animal bond is a special one. The loss of a companion animal, especially due to the actions of another, is a traumatic experience that cannot be resolved by simple monetary compensation. While we appreciate the intention behind this bill, its consequences would set a dangerous precedent which could be used to argue for granting additional rights to pets that are normally reserved for humans.

The proposed damages would be highly subjective, as the bill suggests that the "loss of the reasonably expected society, companionship, love and affection of a pet" should be used to determine such an award. None of these is accompanied by any set of objective criteria or formula, leaving them to be determined on a case-by-case basis with the potential for inconsistent application. This being the case, it would only be a matter of time before certain courts and even individual judges became known for being especially friendly or unfriendly to loss of companionship claims, leading to the possibility of venue-shopping and other abuses of the system.

Such measures could potentially subject veterinarians, groomers, and other animal service providers to excessive claims, and would raise the cost of companion animal care.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), the expansion of non-economic damages would increase the cost of veterinary care, which we have already seen rise across the country. It would also make practicing veterinary medicine more difficult and costly, to the detriment of Rhode Island veterinarians, their clients, and the animals they serve.



For example, malpractice insurance premiums would increase due to the potential claims that could be made, further increasing the cost of veterinary care and reducing affordable service. The patient-veterinarian relationship would also be impacted, as the potential for a lawsuit would lead to vets practicing more defensive medicine.

This also places a risk on the public. If veterinarian care becomes too costly for pet owners, many of them will likely make fewer visits. Pets who don't receive regular health care visits may miss out on necessary vaccinations or getting spayed and neutered, leading to potential public health risks.

Additionally, they have the potential to disproportionately benefit those with access to higher-priced attorneys who can argue for larger awards and, by extension, to encourage attorneys to actively solicit clients seeking these awards. For these reasons and others, courts in thirty-five states have consistently rejected emotion-based liability awards.

Rhode Island law already protects pets by imposing rights and responsibilities on owners to provide care and allows owners to be compensated when their pet is intentionally or negligently killed or injured. Confusing the long-standing classification of pets as legal property would destabilize a criminal system that deters animal abuse; and civil laws that promote innovative, affordable, and quality animal care.

Allowing noneconomic types of legal awards in cases involving injury to pets will have many unintended consequences and may actually harm pets. It is crucial that animals continue to enjoy the protections afforded by their traditional legal treatment as property and not given legal rights reserved for humans. **We ask that you vote NO on this bill and instead, let's work together** to find meaningful ways to advance pet welfare in Rhode Island.

Thank you for your consideration,

Alisa Clements

Deputy Director, Outreach and Advocacy