



NATIONAL LINK COALITION
Working together to stop violence
against people and animals



April 2025

Representative Robert E. Craven, Chair
Representative Carol Hagan McEntee, First Vice Chair
Representative Jason Knight, Second Vice Chair
House Committee on Judiciary
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support for HB 5669 to protect survivors of domestic violence and their pets

Honorable Chair Craven, Chairs Hagan McEntee and Knight, and members of the House Committee on Judiciary,

On behalf of the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) and the National LINK Coalition and our collective supporters in Rhode Island, thank you for this opportunity to support for *An Act Relating To Criminal Procedure – Domestic Violence Prevention Act* (HB 5669). We thank Representative William O'Brien for sponsoring this legislation. We are grateful to the General Assembly for your ongoing commitment to animal protection.

ALDF is the nation's preeminent legal advocacy organization for animals. Our mission is to protect the lives and advance the interests of animals through the legal system, including animals too-often used as tools by abusers who exploit the close bond domestic violence victims have with their animals. The National Link Coalition is the only international educational and advocacy organization working to prevent animal cruelty, domestic violence, child maltreatment, and elder abuse by showing how they intersect. It is understood that there is a Link between violence against humans and violence against animals. Through the global recognition and integration of this understanding into policies and practices, all people and animals will be measurably safer.

It is well-established that there is a strong link between cruelty to animals and violence toward humans,ⁱ which has prompted a societal shift toward violence against animals being taken more seriously by law enforcement, judges, and policymakers. This legislation is a critical next step for protecting survivors and their animals.

HB 5669 adds serious animal cruelty crimes to the list of crimes that, when committed by one family or household member against another, can constitute domestic violence. The enumerated animal cruelty crimes — Title 4, Chapter 1, § 3, 5, and 26 — cover serious and violent offenses such as animal torture and dismemberment and malicious poisoning, abandonment, and killing.

Eighteen states and Washington DC have already enacted similar legislation: Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.ⁱⁱ

We are grateful to the General Assembly for updating the state's protective orders law in 2019 to ensure family courts can provide for the safety and welfare of household animals and pets in protective orders.ⁱⁱⁱ Half of women in domestic violence shelters report they delayed their escape from their abuser out of fear for their animals. Survivors should never have to make the difficult decision to leave their beloved companion animal in the hands of their abuser to escape a dangerous relationship.

Effective protective orders are critically important to protect victims of interpersonal violence. To be effective, they must facilitate keeping survivors together with their animals and also recognize that abusers use harm and threats of harm against domestic violence victims' animals as a tool for control.

Importantly, HB 5669 expands the types of incidents and patterns of behavior that constitute abuse and enable a survivor to secure a protective order by adding certain serious animal cruelty crimes to the definition of "domestic violence." We respectfully request consideration of an amendment to further protect domestic violence victims.

“(a) Domestic violence” includes, but is not limited to, any of the following crimes when committed [or threatened](#) by one family or household member against another...

Further amending the definition of “domestic violence” to *explicitly* cover the use of threatening to commit the enumerated crimes as a form of coercive control as well as incorporating serious animal cruelty crimes as forms of domestic violence would help ensure the court can issue protective orders to even more victims.

Abusers often threaten or harm an animal in order to control or psychologically torment the animal's guardian. Nearly three-quarters of women with companion animals who enter women's shelters reported that their abuser had threatened, injured, maimed, or killed family companion animals for revenge or to psychologically control victims.^{iv}

HB 5669 updates the existing law to assist victims of abuse — both human and animal — safely escape abusive situations. We strongly encourage the advancement of this important legislation in the legislative process.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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ⁱ Dozens of studies document the strong link between animal cruelty and violence against humans, such as intimate partner violence and child abuse. “The Link Between Cruelty to Animals and Violence Toward Humans,” **Animal Legal Defense Fund** <<https://aldf.org/article/the-link-between-cruelty-to-animals-and-violence-toward-humans/>>; “Women with pets more likely to endure domestic abuse, study finds,” **CBC News** (2017) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/women-with-pets-more-likely-to-endure-domestic-abuse-study-finds-1.4151113>; **National Link Coalition** <<http://nationallinkcoalition.org>>.

ⁱⁱ **Alaska** (AS 18.66.990(3)); **Arizona** (Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 13-3601); **Colorado** (Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 18-6-800.3(1)); **Connecticut** (CONN. GEN. STAT. § 46b-15); **Delaware** (§ 1041, Title 10 of the Delaware Code); **Indiana** (Ind. Code Ann. § 31-9-2-42; § 34-6-2-34.5 (2007; amended 2019); § 35-46-3-12.5); **Kentucky** (KRS § 403.720; KRS § 456.010); **Maine** (MRS § 17-A-2-9-201-A); **Massachusetts** (MA [Chapter 118 of the Acts of 2024](#)); **Nebraska** (NRS § 43-2922); **Nevada** (Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 33.018(1)(e)(7)); **New Hampshire** (RSA 173-B:1(I)); **New Jersey** (N.J. STAT. § 2C:25-28); **Tennessee** (Tenn. Code Ann. § 36-3-601(1)); **Utah** (Utah Code 77-36-1(4)(b); 76-5-106.5(1)(b)(ii)); **Vermont** (VT. STAT. tit. 15, § 1101); **Washington** (RCW 7.105.010(37)(a)); **Wisconsin** (WIS. STAT. § 813); **District of Columbia** (District of Columbia Official Code §16-1001(8)(B)).

ⁱⁱⁱ Another bill pending this session, HB 7163, would add specificity to that law by explicitly allowing family courts to order custody of a pet to a victim of abuse or sexual exploitation in a protective order.

^{iv} “Domestic Violence and Pets,” **Red Rover** <<https://redrover.org/domestic-violence-and-pets/>>; “Pets and Domestic Violence,” **National Coalition Against Domestic Violence** <<http://www.hope-eci.org/documents/petsanddv.pdf>>.