

# OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

160 Pine Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02903

TELEPHONE: (401) 222-3492

FAX: (401) 222-3287

EMAIL: [info@ripd.org](mailto:info@ripd.org)

WEBSITE: [www.ripd.org](http://www.ripd.org)

April 22, 2025

## TESTIMONY OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER REGARDING:

House Bill No: 5669

### **ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO CRIMINAL PROCEDURE – DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION ACT.**

Chairman Craven and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

The Office of the Public Defender opposes HB5669, which seeks to include certain animal cruelty charges within the definition of domestic violence. While we recognize the importance of addressing both animal cruelty and domestic violence, we believe this legislation raises significant concerns, particularly in two key areas.

First, the bill targets conduct towards animals “owned or cared for by a household member” without clearly defining “cared for,” which raises significant due process concerns. The term is subjective and open to interpretation, leaving room for inconsistent application. Without a clear and precise definition, individuals may find themselves facing charges without a proper understanding of what constitutes “caring for” an animal. This lack of clarity jeopardizes the due process rights of the accused and hinders their ability to mount an effective defense.

Second, HB5669 does not require a link between the alleged animal abuse and any form of abuse on a household member. It is essential to establish a clear connection between the two in order to ensure that the legislation targets instances where animal abuse is used as a tool to perpetrate violence against individuals within a household. Failing to require this connection may lead to overreach and unintended consequences, potentially ensnaring individuals in the legal system without a justifiable nexus between the two offenses.

States that have enacted laws that include animal cruelty in the domestic violence realm have either created a more direct link between the use of pets to perpetrate harm on domestic-violence victims, or they have added pets to civil protective order laws. For example, Colorado, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Vermont all have recently included “coercive control” within their definitions of domestic abuse, presumably to protect those who may be reluctant to leave abusive

situations out of fear of what will happen to their pets.<sup>1</sup> Threatening to harm a household member's animal has recently become an additional ground one can cite when applying for a civil restraining order in some places.<sup>2</sup> The proposed bill contains neither of these connections between animal abuse and domestic violence.

In summary, while the Office of the Public Defender recognizes the importance of addressing both animal cruelty and domestic violence, we urge the House Judiciary Committee to consider the above concerns raised by HB5669.

Sincerely,



Collin M. Geiselman  
Public Defender  
Office of the Public Defender  
160 Pine Street  
Providence, RI 02903  
401-222-1511  
[cgeiselman@ripd.org](mailto:cgeiselman@ripd.org)

---

<sup>1</sup> C.R.S.A. §§ 18-6-800.3, 13-14-101, 103; M.G.L. c. 209A §1; N.J.S.A. 4:22-17 et seq.; 15 V.S.A. § 1101.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., C.R.S.A. §13-14-101, 103; N.J.S.A. 4:22-17 et seq.