

TESTIMONY in FAVOR of BILL H7545

My name is Kristen Breton. I'm a full time professional with a part time consulting business, I'm a mom to 2 humans and 2 dogs and 2 cats. You may also recognize me as Princess Freckles' mom. The story of Princess Freckles (my rescued St. Bernard) made national and local news in 2024, exposing the horrific death that she suffered as a result of medical negligence from a routine surgical procedure. I pursued legal action and found that there is a need for larger recognition of damages that occur when our pets are harmfully and neglectfully injured.

I am here representing the favorability of this bill (H7545) which would offer non-economic damages (up to \$7500) in a case where a companion animal is harmed or killed as a result of negligent or harmful treatment. This bill adds a reasonable layer of protection and provides a framework in the recuperation of damages sustained when an animal "family member" is harmed or killed via negligence.

While we (animal lovers and owners) understand that there is actually no amount of money that would comfort someone who endures this situation, it is the legal validity that this bill seeks to acknowledge, lending to the favorability of declassification of "pets as property" which would give legal lenience on allowances for damages. There are states that already identify with this leniency, citing that pets are "family" when it comes to matters of custody and chains of care. Most recent of note is PA Bill H97 where they recognize pets as a special category of "sentient family members" in cases of custody and care.

<https://www.palegis.us/legislation/bills/text/PDF/2025/0/HB0097/PN0080>

- **Alaska (2017):** First state to require courts to consider the well-being of an animal in divorce cases.
- **Illinois (2018):** Courts can make provisions for the care of a pet, determining ownership based on the animal's best interests.
- **New Hampshire (2021):** Law mandates consideration of the animal's well-being.
- **California (2019):** Allows judges to assign sole or joint ownership of pets based on the care of the pet.
- **New York (2021/2025):** Passed a law in 2021 regarding custody; a 2025 court ruling further established dogs as immediate family members.
- **Maine (2021):** Legal recognition of pets as family in custody disputes.
- **Pennsylvania (2025):** Passed legislation (HB97) defining pets as "cherished family members" and not just property in custody disputes.

***You will hear opposition from organizations who wish to “challenge the classification of pets as property.”

- Yes! This is exactly what animal advocates and constituents are hoping to accomplish in keeping with our advancement in our societal views and places of value for animals. This shift in perspective is aimed at allowing for stronger and better animal welfare laws.

***You will hear opposition suggesting that such legal expansions would create “unintended negative outcomes, such as increased litigation costs and ownership costs.”

- This is an **assumptive scare suggestion** and there is no direct correlation or data supporting this. If you research the “drivers of increased costs in animal ownership” there is no data or factual information that is tied these statements. (There are indirect possible correlations.) In fact, the responses to this are an overwhelming array of articles citing that the **corporatization of veterinary medicine is the primary driving force behind increased pet care.** Also, it is stated that lawsuits are not the primary driver behind these increased costs.

1. <https://observer.com/2023/03/veterinary-practices-are-increasingly-corporately-owned-and-pets-owners-pay-the-price/>
2. https://pestakeholder.org/media_coverage/private-equity-is-coming-for-your-pets-what-it-means-for-you/
3. <https://greatergood.com/blogs/news/private-equity-veterinarians>
4. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2025/05/31/vet-costs-owners-decline-pet-care/83161751007/>

I am asking you to vote YES in passing bill H7545. While non-economic damages have not traditionally been granted, this bill is an opportunity to continue the advancements in animal advocacy that would lend a very modest fee as a resolution (in combination with any other legal charges for negligence or abuse.)

I invite the State of Rhode Island to join state of Tennessee (who does allow economic damages up to \$5000) for these situations and become the 2nd state to allow for non-economic damages.

<https://www.animallaw.info/statute/tn-pet-damages-§-44-17-403-liability-death-pet-damages-exemptions>

SEARCH ENGINE: “drivers in increased costs of pet ownership”

Top Drivers of Increased Pet Ownership Costs

- **Veterinary Care Inflation:** Rising costs are driven by a shortage of veterinary staff, specialized care (CT/MRI), and increased operational costs, notes [Greenway Animal Clinic](#).
- **Pet Food & Supplies:** Higher manufacturing and ingredient costs, along with supply chain disruptions, have significantly increased the price of food, treats, and daily supplies, says [Vet Candy](#) and [Reader's Digest](#).
- **Increased Demand for Specialized Services:** Enhanced veterinary care, including emergency services and dermatology, has led to higher, more complex medical expenses.
- **Humanization of Pets:** Increased demand for high-quality, organic food, grooming, and specialized accessories has raised the overall cost of care.
- **Pandemic Aftermath:** Delayed routine care during the pandemic has resulted in more complex, costly health issues now, notes Greenway Animal Clinic.
- **Transportation & Travel:** Higher fees for air travel, pet-friendly transportation, and required health certificates add to the financial burden, according to [Yahoo Finance](#).

In 2024, over 6.4 million U.S. pets were insured, with premiums for dogs averaging $\approx \$749$ and $\approx \$386$ for cats, a common strategy to mitigate these rising expenses, say [NerdWallet](#) and [USA Today](#).