

March 21, 2023

The Honorable Marie Waldron
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 829 (Waldron), Crime: animal abuse – SUPPORT LETTER

Dear Assemblymember Waldron:

I write on behalf of **ORGANIZATION** in support of AB 829, the Animal Cruelty and Violence Intervention Act, and to thank you for authoring this important legislation. Current law requires counseling for those on probation for violation of animal abuse under penal code 597. This bill expands the required counseling for violations of other sections of the penal code also related to animal abuse. This bill also states that a judge may require a person to undergo a mental health evaluation and, if deemed beneficial after evaluation, to undergo treatment that would be in lieu of current mandated counseling.

Over the past 30 years, researchers and professionals in a variety of human services and animal welfare disciplines have established significant correlations between animal abuse and violence toward humans. Despite the recognition of this correlation, current sentencing options for animal abuse crimes are largely punitive measures that do little to help end the cycle of violence or rehabilitate offenders. Fines, jail time, probation, and forced animal surrender are the primarily utilized options, but may not be enough to address the underlying issues leading to animal abuse. Appropriate mental health counseling and education are important tools that can benefit public safety as well as reduce offender recidivism rates.

Thankfully, animal cruelty is a growing issue of concern for law enforcement as well as mental health professionals. In fact, currently more than half of all states now have provisions that allow for courts to order psychiatric evaluation and/or counseling as part of an animal abuser's sentence. Such laws recognize that animal abuse can be a symptom of underlying mental health issues. Offenders who display violence towards animals often subsequently commit violent acts towards humans whether it be child abuse, domestic violence, or, as we saw tragically in Parkland, Florida, mass shootings.

Mental health evaluations for animal abusers is an important tool that should be available to courts. They are crucial for rehabilitation of animal abusers and will have a significant impact on the reduction of recidivism rates among animal abusers as well on preventing these abusers from escalating to human victims. It is long overdue that our laws, law enforcement, and correctional system recognize that animal abuse and its probable escalation to further violence is a significant issue, and we must take steps as early as possible to prevent more victims.

For these reasons, **ORGANIZATION** is proud to support AB 829 and urge your colleagues to vote aye on this important measure.

Sincerely,