

Senate considers animal rights bill

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Senate Bill 408, an animal's rights bill, was scheduled for a vote in the Kansas Senate on Monday, but the bill is still in committee.

If it becomes law, the bill would classify the most serious acts of animal cruelty as felonies.

It also would require offenders to undergo psychological counseling or anger management programs and would prohibit offenders from owning an animal for five years.

Kansas is one of nine states in which animal cruelty is not a felony.

Rep. Sydney Carlin (D-Manhattan) said she supports the bill.

"I am very supportive of doing something to stop the poor treatment of these animals who have no voice," Carlin said.

"These people are showing very aggressive behavior because it's against something that can't protect itself, and that's pretty aggressive."

Donna Davis, registered veterinarian technician in the radiation department at the K-State Veterinary Medicine Teaching Hospital, said she has seen the result of animal cruelty while working at the hospital.

"A puppy was brought in that was found dead," Davis said. "It had been kicked and beaten to death by the owner."

Davis said three kittens were also brought in with gunshot wounds.

"These situations are just really hard to see and deal with," she said. "People who do such horrible things to animals really have a lack of respect for an animal's life."

Davis said she supports the bill and thinks the tougher punishments might deter people from abusing animals.

"If these people saw a situation where someone was prosecuted with severe enough consequences they may think twice before hurting an animal," she said.

Connie Ellis, vice president of the Animal Welfare Club, said she started a petition in September urging Kansas lawmakers to bring the bill up for vote.

“This needs to be brought to people’s attention,” Ellis, second-year veterinary medicine student, said. “This is a sick behavior that needs to be addressed more seriously.”

Ellis said she stresses the importance of rehabilitating those who are convicted of abusing animals.

“It’s not just about jail time. These people need help,” she said. “There is no point in putting them in jail without giving them the help to change their deep-seated neurosis.”

Ellis said she has seen situations in which animal cruelty was suspected and said these situations put veterinarians in tough positions.

“Without knowing what really happens we can only speculate,” Ellis said. “And it’s our job to report it, but when the law makes it really hard to prosecute, a lot of DAs don’t even want to pursue it.”

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