

Fact Sheet

Support SB 285/286: Increase Penalties for Cruelty

Michigan's animal cruelty statute (MCL 750.50 and 750.50b) includes severe penalties for deliberate or inadvertent cruelty, neglect, or abandonment, and for deliberately torturing, mutilating, maiming, or disfiguring animals. However, recent cases involving deliberate cruelty to specific kinds of animals, the hoarding and neglect of large numbers of animals in breeding facilities and pet stores, and the threatening or retaliatory abuse of animals in domestic situations have revealed the need for increased penalties to address these types of crimes.



Photo Credit: Dearborn Heights, Mich. Police Dept.

SB 285 adds definitions for “companion animals,” “breeder,” and “pet shop” to the animal cruelty statute, and increases the penalties for acts of cruelty to more than 25 animals and for knowingly harming a companion animal. It also adds a felony-level penalty for chronic violations of Michigan’s “Pet Shops, Dog Pounds, and Animal Shelters” law. SB 286 updates the state’s code of criminal procedure to add penalties for crimes that cause serious psychological injury to the owner of a companion animal that requires professional treatment, among other penalty upgrades.

Address deliberate cruelty to companion animals. The critical link between domestic violence and cruelty to animals has been well established, and research has shown consistent patterns of animal cruelty among perpetrators of other forms of violence, including child abuse, spousal abuse, and elder abuse. A recent, alarming case in Michigan involved a suspect—who was also studying to become a health care professional—who repeatedly targeted and killed a specific breed of dog. By increasing penalties cases involving deliberate cruelty to companion animals, law enforcement can better target and isolate those who pose a danger to society. Additionally, violent abusers often target their victim’s animals as a means of maintaining control over their victim. Tougher penalties for crimes that cause serious psychological injury to the owner of a companion animal, and for those who deliberately violate a personal protection order, will help address domestic violence crimes that use a threat of harm to companion animals as a controlling measure.

Address repeated violations of the law regulating pet shops. Last year, more than a hundred animals—including dogs, birds, guinea pigs, hamsters, frogs, snakes, lizards, chinchillas, and mice—were seized from deplorable conditions in a Dearborn Heights pet store, but our state’s “Pet Shops, Dog Pounds, and Animal Shelters” law has only misdemeanor penalties for such neglect and does not address repeat offenders. SB 285 creates specific penalties of imprisonment of up to two years and fines of up to \$5,000 for those who have been convicted for five or more violations of the law.

Please support SB 285/286 to increase penalties for animal cruelty in Michigan!

