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**TO: Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee**

**cc: Representative Todd Stephens  
Kristen Tullo, Humane PA**

**FROM: Cathleen Palm, Founder** 

**DATE: June 12, 2017**

**RE: Support for House Bill 1238 - Protecting Animals and Protecting Children**

The Center for Children's Justice (C4CJ) supports House Bill 1238.

House Bill 1238 represents a comprehensive animal protection bill. In the last year, there has been an impressive bipartisan and bicameral effort to enhance protections for Pennsylvania's animals.

It might seem odd that Pennsylvania's leading statewide independent nonprofit advocating for abused children is weighing in on a bill that is entirely about the safety and well-being of animals.

In reality there is nothing odd about it. C4CJ intentionally relies on research and evidence to fully inform our work to prevent child abuse and to improve outcomes for victimized children.

House Bill 1238 deserves support, because the research is considerable about the significant correlation between the abuse of animals and the abuse of children.

In 2016, The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reworked the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) system adding Animal Cruelty to the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) as a Group A offence and as a Crime Against Society. The National Sheriffs' Association was among the organizations that supported the change citing that "there is a scientifically proven connection between animal cruelty and child abuse, domestic violence, other interpersonal violence, and juvenile delinquency." Historically animal cruelty crimes were reported to the FBI through a catch all "other" category. This practice made it difficult to track the scope and types of crimes against animals, let alone to study the degree to which there were co-occurring crimes against animals and humans.

While we wish we did not, C4CJ can provide Pennsylvania specific examples to underscore how often the abuse of an animal is a precursor to or intertwined with the abuse of a child.

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For example, earlier this year Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro took action addressing a “horrendous case” of sexual abuse against a child.<sup>1</sup> A number of individuals were involved and the criminal charges were extensive and included child rape, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse and child pornography. One of the individuals connected to the Pennsylvania child sexual abuse case faced criminal charges in Virginia related to bestiality<sup>2</sup> and animal cruelty.<sup>3</sup> This Virginia man and another defendant in the Pennsylvania child sexual abuse case reportedly shared a “sexual interest” in dogs and young boys.<sup>4</sup>

Last year, C4CJ was fortunate to have the opportunity, along with Humane PA and the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV), to train members of Pennsylvania’s minor judiciary about the link between abuse against animals and abuse against humans. In that training, C4CJ highlighted how often perpetrators use a child’s love of a cherished pet to groom the child or to win the silence of the victimized child. We also unfortunately were able to share real-life reminders that too often abuse against an animal preceded or was intertwined with lethal violence against a child.

Tragically these real-life scenarios continue. Earlier this month, two Pennsylvania children were killed alongside their dog. The young children and their dog discovered shot in a burning home as part of a murder-suicide. In another county, another child was left to die alongside her two cats and her beaten mother also in a home set ablaze. This child thankfully survived, her mother and cats did not.

With your support, House Bill 1238 can win the support of the Pennsylvania Senate and then be sent to Governor Tom Wolf’s desk.

In doing so, the Pennsylvania General Assembly will provide much needed protections for Pennsylvania’s animals. Equally compelling, enactment of House Bill 1238 ensures that Pennsylvania’s law enforcement officials will gain a potent tool to prevent violence against children.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/Media\\_and\\_Resources/Press\\_Releases/Press\\_Release/?pid=3020](https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/Media_and_Resources/Press_Releases/Press_Release/?pid=3020)

<sup>2</sup> <https://eapps.courts.state.va.us/gdcourts/criminalDetail.do?formAction=newSearch?ts=1485793521589&clientSearchCounter=3&localFipsCode=087>

<sup>3</sup> <https://eapps.courts.state.va.us/gdcourts/criminalDetail.do?formAction=newSearch?ts=1485795727127&clientSearchCounter=3&localFipsCode=087>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.philly.com/philly/news/Police-Bucks-man-abused-child-as-part-of-animal-costumed-sex-ring.html>

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