



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Senator Griffo's Weekly Column #22: Combating Animal Abuse

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO May 29, 2014

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I take abuse against animals very seriously. It's not only deplorable to hurt an innocent pet, but it is oftentimes an indicator of additional problems within a household, whether it be manipulation, neglect, abuse, or violence toward humans.

That's why I've sponsored several bills during my Senate tenure to combat animal cruelty. They haven't all passed and become law, but their intent was laudable: Better information and investigations on animal fighting – and stiffer penalties for offenders. Also, one bill would have created tougher laws to use against people who abuse 10 or more animals at the same time.

One bill I co-sponsored is a law: Killing or injuring a police animal is now a felony offense, instead of a misdemeanor.

Unfortunately, there's much more that needs to be done to limit abuse and neglect. Justice for Lainey, an animal advocacy group, was formed in response to a series of high-profile incidents of animal cruelty in my district. I've talked with them extensively about legislation, but also about the need for additional education.

With their urging – and that of the New York State Humane Association - I recently hosted an educational forum for police officers who work in Oneida County. I brought in an expert who specialized in animal abuse and a representative from the District Attorney's Office. Together, they taught officers how to identify abuse and neglect; how to approach abused animals; how to remove animals from an abusive environment and how to collect evidence that would lead to a successful prosecution of those responsible for the abuse.

I'm pleased to say the event was well attended: Twenty-six people, representing 17 unique agencies, came for the half-day forum. My hope is that, working collaboratively, we can discourage animal abuse by encouraging quicker, more accurate reporting and getting better results in court.

I'm also continuing my effort to improve officer training and education through legislative means. My bill, S.6406, would make the animal crimes we already have on the books more accessible to officers. One of our biggest problems is that many crimes against animals are part of the Agriculture & Markets Law. Officers are trained extensively in Penal Law and Vehicle & Traffic Law, so they're less familiar with animal cruelty statutes.

I want to transplant the animal crimes to a law book that officers routinely use, take out the antiquated laws and make the language easy to understand and accessible to police, to prosecutors and to judges.

Animal abuse will be an ongoing concern during my time in the Legislature. As long as there's people who continue to be cruel to animals, I will be working with advocates to combat their dangerous behavior.