NATIONAL LINK COALITION

Working together to stop violence against people and animals

The National Resource Center on the Link between Animal Abuse and Human Violence
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A spaniel, a woman
and a walnut tree:
the more they're beaten
the better they be.
-- Old English proverb

To the Michigan State Legislature:

The National Link Coalition – which serves as the National Resource Center on the Link between Animal Abuse and Human Violence – has been following the rapid enactment of statutes that enable courts to include animals in domestic violence Protection-From-Abuse orders. Since these were introduced in Maine in 2006, 28 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have enacted such legislation. Our coalition – one of our Steering Committee members and 38 of our 2,400 members are Michigan residents – is in support of HB 4478.

In the battles of power and control that mark domestic violence cases, batterers take advantage of any opportunity to intimidate their victims, often using pets with whom the victim has a close emotional attachment.

- As many as **71%** of victims in women's shelters report that their abuser harmed, killed or threatened family pets. *(Ascione, Weber & Wood, 1997).*
- Twelve independent surveys report that **between 18% and 48%** of battered women delay their decision to leave, or return to their batterer, out of fear for the welfare of their pets or livestock *(Ascione, 2007).*

Considerable evidence corroborates the anecdotal reports of domestic violence survivors:

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN ANIMAL ABUSE AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

1. Animal abuse is consistent with, and often co-occurs with, the power and control mechanisms prevalent in intimate partner violence.

> *In a case in East Toledo, Ohio, involving a couple with marital disputes, when she returned home her husband told her, "Your dinner is in the oven." When she went into the kitchen she found he had baked her cat to death at 500 degrees.*

Pets become pawns in the game of power and control when batterers manipulate, intimidate and retaliate against their victims. Abusers take advantage of women's and children's attachments to pets by threatening to harm or kill the family pet to ensure the woman will not leave or that the child will not report the abuse.

- As many as **13%** of intentional animal abuse cases involve domestic violence *(Humane Society of the U.S., 2001).*
- One study reported that **87%** of batterer-perpetrated pet abuse was committed in the presence of their partners for the purpose of revenge or control *(Quinlisk, 1999).*
- **41%** of batterers have adult histories of abusing animals (compared to 1.5% of the general population) *(Febres et al., 2014).*
- Animals are targeted by abusers who are jealous that the woman gives more attention to her pets than to him. Pets remain at risk even after a relationship has ended, with abusers extracting vengeance against the pets belonging to family members and friends who helped the woman to leave *(Roguski, 2012).*

2. If he's hurting animals, the women and children are often next.

Many women blame themselves for the batterer's actions; however, showing her that his hurting the pets means the fault lies in his behavior, not hers, she is more likely to realize it is time for her to leave.

- **78%** of abused women reported that animal abuse had occurred "often" or "almost always" during the previous 12 months. Incidents included punching, hitting, choking, drowning, shooting, stabbing, and throwing the animal against a wall or down the stairs. Animal abuse coincided with violent outbursts against human family members **51%** of the time *(Carlisle-Frank & Flanagan, 2006).*

3. The issue is particularly acute in rural areas, where facilities for domestic violence survivors are more limited.

- The Ohio Domestic Violence Network identified significant gaps in services available for women and their animals in rural Ohio *(Ohio Domestic Violence Network, 2012).*
- Studies in Wisconsin, Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island found that abusers often retaliate by torturing or killing livestock as well as pets. This is of particular concern in rural communities *(Faver & Strand, 2003; Lembke, 1999; Doherty & Hornosty, 2008).*

4. Female pet owners often have strong emotional ties to their animals that make them particularly vulnerable.
Researchers have found that women express considerable empathy, affection and concern for animals, which can be used against them by batterers seeking emotional control.

- In nine studies assessing animal abuse as a risk factor for intimate personal violence, **between 40.2% and 90.6%** of battered women had pets in their homes *(Ascione, 2007).*

5. In addition to harm to animals and battered women, cruelty to animals has deleterious effects on children's development.
Children's witnessing or perpetrating animal cruelty should be considered an Adverse Childhood Experience and a risk factor for future health concerns.

- Children who are exposed to domestic violence are nearly three times more likely to have been cruel to animals than children not exposed to such violence *(Currie, 2006).*
- **32%** of battered women reported their children had hurt or killed a family pet *(Ascione, 1998).*

THE INTERGENERATIONAL CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

(National Link Coalition, 2014)

One Part of the Solution: Including Animals in Protective Orders

Including animals in protective orders removes one obstacle that prevents victims from seeking safety. It ensures their welfare, protects all victims, and breaks the cycles of family violence.

Including pets in domestic violence protective orders is a proactive step toward combating the cycle of interpersonal violence and recognizes that intimate partner violence adversely affects the health, safety and welfare of all members of the family.

- At least **32 domestic violence shelters in Michigan** are believed to have established collaborative partnerships with local animal welfare groups to provide safehousing foster care for pets.

- Four pet-friendly domestic violence shelters in **Coldwater, Howell, Port Huron and Saginaw** have built animal kennels at the shelter in order to maintain the safety and integrity of the entire family – both two-legged and four-legged members.

Including pets in domestic violence protection orders protects communities and addresses the links of violence that envelop all vulnerable members of Michigan's families.

> ***"About a hundred miles down the interstate, he opened the car door and ordered my daughter Christine to kick our dog Dusty out. When she refused, he told her he would do to Dusty what he did to Rocko, only he would do it right this time, and she could watch while he tortured and killed Dusty and dumped her off the side of the road, too. Then he said he would come home and kill me and Christine would be left alone with him.***
>
> ***"He raped Christine her first night alone in our new home while I was at work. She had just turned eight."***
>
> **-- Marsha Millikin: "Life and Death Inside the Cycles of Violence."**

Thank you for your earnest consideration of HB 4478 and for the protections it will offer to vulnerable family members in Michigan. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we may provide further insights regarding the significance of this measure.

Sincerely,

Phil Arkow

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