



July 29, 2025

RE: Senate Bill 1263 and House Bill 1764

Dear Chairpersons Edwards, Day, and members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary,

On behalf of the responsible pet care community, **we ask that you vote NO on Senate Bill 1263 and House Bill 1764.**

As the advocacy voice of the responsible pet care community, the [Pet Advocacy Network](https://petadvocacy.org) represents the interests and expertise of retailers, companion animal suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, pet owners, and others involved in the many aspects of pet care across the United States. Our association promotes animal well-being and responsible pet ownership, fosters environmental stewardship, and ensures healthy pets' availability through our local, state, and federal work. In addition, we routinely advocate for legislative and regulatory proposals to protect the health, safety, and availability of companion animals.

Senate Bill 1263

As representatives of those who serve and support pets and pet owners, we know that the human-animal bond is a special one. The loss of a companion animal, especially due to the actions of another, is a traumatic experience that cannot be resolved by simple monetary compensation. While we appreciate the intention behind SB 1263, it would set a dangerous precedent which could be used to argue for granting additional rights to pets that are normally reserved for humans.

The proposed damages would be highly subjective, as the bill suggests that the "loss of the reasonably expected society, companionship, love and affection of a pet" should be used to determine such an award. None of these is accompanied by any set of objective criteria or formula, leaving them to be determined on a case-by-case basis with the potential for inconsistent application. This being the case, it would only be a matter of time before certain courts and even individual judges became known for being especially friendly or unfriendly to loss of companionship claims, leading to the possibility of venue-shopping and other abuses of the system.

Such measures could potentially subject veterinarians, groomers, and other animal service providers to excessive claims, and would raise the cost of companion animal care.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), the expansion of noneconomic damages would increase the cost of veterinary care, which we have already seen rise across the country. It would also make practicing veterinary medicine more difficult and costly, to the detriment of Massachusetts veterinarians, their clients, and the animals they serve.

For example, malpractice insurance premiums would increase due to the potential claims that could be made, further increasing the cost of veterinary care and reducing affordable service. The patient-

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veterinarian relationship would also be impacted, as the potential for a lawsuit would lead to vets practicing more defensive medicine.

This also places a risk on the public. If veterinarian care becomes too costly for pet owners, many of them will likely make fewer visits. Pets who don't receive regular health care visits may miss out on necessary vaccinations, leading to potential public health risks.

Additionally, they have the potential to disproportionately benefit those with access to higher-priced attorneys who can argue for larger awards and, by extension, encourage attorneys to actively solicit clients seeking these awards. For these reasons and others, courts in thirty-five states have consistently rejected emotion-based liability awards.

Massachusetts law already protects pets by imposing rights and responsibilities on owners to provide care and allows owners to be compensated when their pet is intentionally or negligently killed or injured. Confusing the long-standing classification of pets as legal property would destabilize a criminal system that deters animal abuse; and civil laws that promote innovative, affordable, and quality animal care.

Allowing noneconomic types of legal awards in cases involving injury to pets will have many unintended consequences and may actually harm pets. It is crucial that animals continue to enjoy the protections afforded by their traditional legal treatment as property and not given legal rights reserved for humans.

We ask that you vote NO on SB 1263 and instead, let's work together to find meaningful ways to advance pet welfare in Massachusetts.

House Bill 1764

Animal abuser registries can be a valuable tool for law enforcement and the pet care community to identify individuals with a history of animal cruelty and help keep animals safe. However, the way these registries are implemented matters greatly. Some enforcement approaches—such as requiring pet store employees or shelter volunteers to verify a customer's background—can place innocent workers in potentially dangerous situations, forcing them to confront known offenders who may pose a serious threat to their safety and that of others.

We appreciate the intent behind the bill to address access to pets for those individuals that have been convicted of animal abuse. **However, we request that you not advance SB 1764, as currently written.** The proposed point-of-sale verification requirement would mandate that retail employees and animal shelter staff/volunteers check whether potential customers appear on an animal abuser registry before processing a pet sale. This enforcement mechanism places an undue burden on retail personnel and exposes them to unnecessary risks.

If an individual on the registry attempts to adopt or purchase a pet, the store or shelter is responsible for denying the transaction—or risk fines or legal consequences. This places frontline employees and volunteers in a dangerous position. Confronting someone already convicted of a violent offense poses

real risks to their personal safety, especially in settings that are not equipped to handle conflict or ensure security. Imagine a young volunteer at a community animal shelter having to tell a known offender that they are barred from adopting a pet. This volunteer would be forced into an interaction that could quickly escalate, putting everyone involved at risk.

Retail employees and shelter volunteers—many of whom are young and working at their first job or are retirees supplementing their income—are not trained to handle conflicts nor do they carry the authority of being a law enforcement professional. Requiring shelter staff and volunteers to take on this kind of enforcement role exposes them to real and unnecessary risk.

Research consistently shows that animal abuse is closely linked to other forms of violence, including domestic abuse, child abuse, and even homicide. Individuals convicted of animal cruelty have already demonstrated a capacity for violence, making it dangerously unrealistic to assume they will respond calmly when confronted and denied an adoption or sale.

- Animal abusers are five times as likely to harm a person
- 60 percent of child abuse cases also had animals in the home that had been abused
- Animal abuse is often the first point of intervention for domestic violence
- More than 50 percent of battered women report their abuser also abused their animal companions

To ensure the safety and well-being of pet store employees and shelter volunteers who could be put in harm's way by confronting individuals with a history of violence, **it is critical that point-of-sale verification NOT be included in SB 1764.**

The enforcement of animal abuser registries should be left to law enforcement professionals who are trained to successfully handle conflicts and situations that could turn violent. More effective ways to enforce animal abuser registries, without endangering innocent store employees or shelter volunteers, include:

- Requiring states to regularly follow up with the abusers on the registry, providing law enforcement the opportunity to expertly identify and appropriately punish cases of abuse.
- Having the state frequently distribute the names and pictures of registry offenders to stores and shelters to share with employees and volunteers, who would be instructed to contact authorities if they see someone on the list attempting to obtain a pet.

Again, we appreciate the efforts of this body to address and prevent animal cruelty. **However, we respectfully urge you to reject SB 1764, as written.** Stores and shelters must be able to keep their employees and volunteers out of danger. It should not be their responsibility to enforce the animal abuse registry and have to turn away someone convicted of animal cruelty that is attempting to obtain a pet.



We welcome the opportunity to work with you on meaningful solutions to prevent animal abuse while protecting the employees and volunteers in the pet care community. We would be happy to discuss alternative ways to address this important issue at your convenience.

Thank you for your consideration,

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