



OWNING FIVE ANIMALS COULD MEAN “ANIMAL HOARDING” IN VERMONT

The Issue:

A bill has been introduced in the Vermont Legislature defining anyone that possesses five or more animals as an “animal hoarder”. [House Bill 371](#) provides that anyone who commits animal hoarding in Vermont is guilty of animal cruelty and faces criminal penalties.

The Impact:

HB 371 amends current law by defining an “animal hoarder” as any person who does the following:

- possesses five or more animals;
- fails to provide adequate food, water, shelter, rest, sanitation, or necessary medical attention, or transports an animal in overcrowded vehicles;
- keeps the animals in a severely overcrowded environment; and
- displays an inability to recognize or understand the nature of or has a reckless disregard for the conditions under which the animals are living and the deleterious impact they have on the animals' health and well-being.

Anyone convicted of animal hoarding is guilty of the crime of cruelty to animals and could face imprisonment of up to one year, a fine of up to 2000 or both. Second and subsequent convictions are punishable of imprisonment of up to two years, a fine of up to \$5000 or both.

Under Vermont animal cruelty statutes, a humane officer may seize an animal being cruelly treated **WITHOUT** a search warrant if the humane officer witnesses a situation in which the humane officer determines that an animal's life is in jeopardy and immediate action is required to protect the animal's health or safety. A "humane officer" or "officer" is defined as “any law enforcement officer, auxiliary state police officers, deputy game wardens, humane society officer, employee or agent, elected animal control officer, animal control officer appointed by the legislative body of a municipality, local board of health officer or agent, or any officer authorized to serve criminal process.

PIJAC Position:

PIJAC strongly supports reasonable laws to protect against abusive or negligent treatment of pets. Laws that permit warrantless searches of private citizens invite potential for harassment and abuse of police powers. Vermont law specifically states that “the Vermont Humane Federation, Inc., or its successor, or any incorporated humane society which, through its agents has the lawful authority to interfere with acts of cruelty to animals.” This is an open invitation for harassment of pet owners, breeders and more. Police powers should be reserved for persons employed by designated government agencies and should not be extended to private citizens.

Recommended Action:

House Bill 371 currently sits in the [House Committee on Agriculture](#) where it has yet to be set for committee hearing. Those interested in or affected by this legislation should contact [members of the committee](#) to voice their concerns. Check the [Breaking News page](#) of the PIJAC website often for updates on this and many other bills.

If you have any additional questions or concerns please contact PIJAC's Bambi Nicole Osborne at 202-452-1525, ext. 105 or via email at bambi@pijac.org.

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The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) has been protecting and promoting responsible pet ownership for nearly forty years. Follow our successes, events, and action alerts through Facebook and/or Twitter at PIJAC4pets. If you are not already a Member, please join us today by visiting www.pijac.org/membership. For additional information on PIJAC and its many exciting campaigns, please visit: www.pijac.org. Or, contact us at 1-800-553-PETS (1-800-553-7387); members@pijac.org.

On behalf of pets, responsible pet owners, and the pet industry, we thank you!