

# COMMITTEE NEWS

## Animal Law

**SPECIAL ISSUE: Raising Consciousness, Building Relationships and Making a Difference for Animals and People**

### When Love Isn't Enough: Why Alternative Dispute Resolution Is The Best Gift You Can Give Your Pet

Here's a truth most lawyers won't tell you: The courtroom is the worst possible place to resolve a conflict about an animal you love. I've spent my career helping people navigate disputes over their pets, and I can tell you that even when the law tries to do right by animals—nine states now have groundbreaking pet custody legislation<sup>1</sup>—the adversarial process of litigation damages everyone involved. Most importantly, it fails the animals whose welfare the law claims to protect.

Between 2016 and 2025, Alaska, Illinois, California, New Hampshire, Maine, New York, Washington, D.C., Delaware, and Rhode Island all enacted laws requiring courts to consider a companion animal's well-being or best interest in divorce proceedings.<sup>2</sup> Pennsylvania is poised to join them.<sup>3</sup> This legislative progress matters. It acknowledges that pets aren't furniture. But here's what the statutes can't fix: Litigation itself. Its cost, its emotional toll, its winner-take-all framework works against the very outcomes these laws seek to achieve.

[Read more on page 29](#)

**By: Debra Hamilton, Esq.,**  
*Hamilton Law and Mediation, PLLC*

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Chair Message

*“The key to growth is the introduction of higher dimensions of consciousness into your awareness.” – Lao Tzu*

*“Personal relationships are the fertile soil from which all advancement, all success, all achievement in real life grows.” – Ben Stein*

*Whether they stem from business or personal situations, our relationships are what support us, connect us, and allow us to progress in all aspects of our lives. – Michelle Tillis Lederman*

**You matter and the Committee is here to help you help animals!**

Each one of us has made a conscious decision to join the American Bar Association Tort Trial and Insurance Practice Section Animal Law Committee. Everyone contributes in their own way, and your being here matters and you matter. Your membership and presence alone make us better, different, stronger. This is true even for those who may simply monitor and read things. It is especially the case for the increasing number of members who show up and pitch in as they can. Opportunities abound and we are happy to help you make as much of your membership experience as you want to make of it. This ABA year, we are committed to helping every member enhance their personal and professional development, and reading this newsletter is a good source of growth. Personal and professional development of each member is important, because the better we become, the more effective we are, and the more impactful we make the Committee's work. That helps animals!

**Looking at things anew and thinking differently fosters change.**

In addition to personal and professional development, we are also highlighting different pathways to change, featuring constructive approaches, to help us to understand a broader range of things we can do to drive positive change on behalf of animals. These two areas of emphasis this year flow from our overarching theme, “Raising consciousness, building relationships and making a difference for animals and people.”

Simply stated, in 36 plus years of practicing in this field, Animal Law is all about raising consciousness about nonhuman animals, their interests, protection and well-being. It also includes raising consciousness about others which is an oft neglected essential step in helping them to choose to lift their own consciousness. Change and elevating our consciousness come from within and that will guide us in building relationships and working collaboratively with others to change together. To do this effectively requires us to hear, understand and respect each other. When we do that,



**James Gesualdi**

James F. Gesualdi, P.C.

*James F. Gesualdi is the ALC Chair and an animal law attorney in private practice spanning over 35 years. He is the author of EXCELLENCE BEYOND COMPLIANCE: Enhancing Animal Welfare Through the Constructive Use of the Animal Welfare Act. He has published other numerous articles including as a regular contributing columnist to the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance Academy's e-Newsletter (Getting Better All the Time) on continuous improvement and advancing animal interests, protection, and well-being for ten years. Mr. Gesualdi was a former Special Professor of Law, Hofstra University School of Law, taught Animal Law, and has lectured extensively on constructive approaches to building consensus and fostering transformative, sustainable change to better serve animals. He served as Chair of the New York State Bar Association Committee on Animals and the Law and was the founding Co-Chair, Suffolk County Bar Association Animal Law Committee. He was a Vice Chair of the American Bar Association's first Animal Law committee and The Young Lawyers' Division Animal Protection Committee. Mr. Gesualdi was the inaugural recipient of the New York State Bar Association Committee on Animals and the Law Exemplary Service Award (2018), and recipient of the American Bar Association, Tort Trial and Insurance Practice Section, Animal Law Committee Excellence in the Advancement of Animal Law Award (2019).*



continue to work on ourselves, and combine our personal forces with others also striving to change things for good, we make a difference for animals and people, the latter though not our prime focus, ensures change that is good, lasting and sustainable. Remember, how we do things and what we do are as important to making things better as the improvements that result from our right actions.

**The diverse and thoughtful articles contributing to this themed issue share beautiful stories about several members' unique contributions.**

The Animal Law Committee is a truly special community. We are fortunate to have caring and dedicated members. This is a very special issue of our ever-outstanding newsletter. In this issue, some very accomplished members show us different ways they have broken new ground making a difference for animals and people by raising consciousness and building relationships. These articles cover an expansive array of experiences, and each one contains incredible insights that will inspire *you* as to the possibilities for change.

Jessica Chapman, a thoughtful lawyer with an animal advocacy organization, has effectively engaged in culturally sensitive, respectful community and relationship-building with indigenous peoples to empower them to further help animals. Representative of the care Jessica takes in her work, her article is a collaborative piece with the voices of some of the indigenous people she has seen, heard and worked hand in hand with. (Special heartfelt thanks to Jessica's "co-authors" for opening their hearts and illuminating ours.). Debra Hamilton, a pioneering mediator, shares lessons from her experiences with Alternative Dispute Resolution, Mediation and Collaborative Practice to resolve disputes between people regarding animals. Case by case, matter by matter, more humane outcomes result and make a difference.

Megan Senatori, a tireless leader within Animal Law academia and on domestic violence awareness, and distinguished courtroom lawyer and Committee humorist, Tom Mugavero, spearheaded the adoption and ongoing implementation of ABA Resolution 25M504 on protecting domestic violence survivors and their pets. Their article notes the contributions of so many to making the resolution possible and lays out a trustworthy road map for future Committee efforts. This is also an invaluable model for making ABA resolutions more impactful in the real world. In his column, legendary Animal Law practitioner, Bruce Wagman, draws upon his three-plus decades of unmatched experience to testify to vivid examples of changes making animals' lives better, made possible through creative community and consensus-building. Law student member, Jo Anderson, shares her insights on the secret



advantages of the raised consciousness one brings when practicing law as a second career. To underscore her message, she leveraged her relationships with other Committee members to incorporate their experiences. Also included is a reflection on other constructive lessons derived throughout my journey in Animal Law.

In sum, the work underlying these articles provides a broad representation of raising consciousness, collaboration and relationship-building that makes a difference for animals and people.

### The more you look, the more you will find in the newsletter.

Thanks to Editor Molly Armus, her excellent team of associate editors, Bianka Atlas, Adam Cook, Holly Spainhower and Jennifer Hee, and all the contributors to the extensive and informative content throughout the newsletter, there is so much uplifting and useful material to review, study and grow from. Every contribution matters, every reader matters. You matter! Thank you for joining with us in “Raising consciousness, building relationships and making a difference for animals and people.” ➤

James Gesualdi, Chair, ABA TIPS Animal Law Committee

*“Leadership is all about building relationships, understanding people, and inspiring them to be their best.” – Barack Obama*

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Headline Animal Law News

## ANIMALS IN AGRICULTURE

### Undercover Investigation Uncovers Animal Cruelty and Food Safety Issues at Raw Milk Dairy Farms

In the fall of 2025, Animal Outlook, a national animal advocacy organization, conducted an [undercover investigation](#) at six family-run dairy farms across upstate New York. Each of these farms sold raw milk directly to consumers. The footage uncovered systemic cruelty, including: cows living with open wounds and swollen joints; cows being milked even though they had painful mastitis infections; tail docking and horn burning on calves; and conditions of filth and extreme confinement. Though these farms were smaller in scale and provided direct-to-consumer sales, the investigation revealed practices and conditions similar to those found on large-scale industrial dairy farms that supply products nationally.

**By: Irina Anta**

Raw milk has increased in popularity over the past few years. Some consider it to be healthier than the standard pasteurized milk, which has been heated enough to kill bacteria. U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, [Robert F. Kennedy Jr.](#), is a major proponent of raw milk, claiming it “advances human health” and reiterating his intent to deregulate sale and consumption of the product. While most states allow some sales of raw milk, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) prohibits the interstate sale of unpasteurized dairy products for human consumption because of health risks. The [FDA warns](#) that poor farm hygiene and poor animal health often go hand in hand with high counts of bacteria in milk.

Shortly after Animal Outlook’s investigation concluded, [two people fell ill](#) after consuming contaminated raw milk from one of the exposed farms.

## COMPANION ANIMALS

### Uniform Law Commission Convenes Drafting Committee

The [National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws \(ULC\)](#) is moving forward with its efforts to develop a uniform law regarding pets at family dissolution. Following a series of meetings in late 2025, the ULC Study Committee submitted its final report in December 2025, recommending the convening of a formal drafting committee to address “[Ownership or Possession of Pets at Family Dissolution and Other Related Issues.](#)”

**By: Megan Senatori &  
Tom Mugavero**



In January 2026, the Scope Committee's recommendation was officially approved by the ULC Executive Committee. The approved resolution is as follows:

“RESOLVED, that the Committee on Scope and Program recommends to the Executive Committee that a Drafting Committee on Ownership or Possession of Pets at Family Dissolution and Domestic Violence Proceedings be formed.”

Our appointments as ABA Advisors have been extended to this new Drafting Committee. We will continue to monitor the ULC's progress closely and provide regular updates to the Animal Law Committee and the broader ABA. Current projections suggest the Drafting Committee's work will span approximately two years. We look forward to contributing to this important development in animal law.

## DIVERSITY EQUITY INCLUSION JUSTICE

### HUD Withdraws Fair Housing Act Assistance Animal Guidance

On September 17, 2025, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) [withdrew](#) several Fair Housing Act (FHA) guidance documents, including *FEHO 2020-01: Assessing a Person's Request to Have an Animal as a Reasonable Accommodation Under the Fair Housing Act*, in accordance with President Donald Trump's deregulatory executive orders.

By: Krista Wirth

This [guidance](#) gave housing providers a set of best practices for complying with the Fair Housing Act (FHA) when assessing an individual's reasonable accommodation request to live with their service animal or emotional support animal in housing that might otherwise have policies barring the animals' access (e.g., no-pet policies, or breed or size restrictions). It also explained housing providers' obligations.

HUD's [guidance](#) clarified that individuals may request reasonable accommodations for two types of assistance animals: service animals and “other animals [who] do work, perform tasks, provide assistance, and/or provide therapeutic emotional support for individuals with disabilities” (support animals). Neither service animals nor support animals are considered “pets” for FHA purposes. HUD's guidance stated that housing providers may charge fees or deposits for pets but may not do so for assistance animals. It further stated that housing providers may not deny a reasonable accommodation based solely on the size or breed of a service or support dog.



The FHEO stated that the [withdrawal](#) is not necessarily final and that the agency intends to review the guidance to determine whether it should be reinstated or revised and reissued. Meanwhile, [advocates](#) are concerned that the absence of federal guidance will increase unlawful denials of accommodation requests involving assistance animals.

## EQUINE LAW

### Betting on Survival: Santa Anita and California's Historical Horse Racing Battle

In January 2026, events at Santa Anita Park escalated into a major legal dispute between the racetrack and the state of California over the legality of Racing on Demand wagering terminals. On January 17, while live racing was underway, agents from the California Department of Justice (DOJ), accompanied by Arcadia police officers, entered the Santa Anita grandstand and [seized 26 Racing on Demand machines](#). The operation was conducted publicly, with the terminals removed on gurneys and loaded onto a truck. The DOJ did not obtain a warrant, asserting that the racetrack was an open business engaged in ongoing criminal activity. Shortly afterward, the DOJ [issued a notice](#) stating that the machines would be destroyed after 30 days and that any seized cash would be forfeited unless a court intervened.

By: **Johannah Anderson**

The racetrack's operator, the Los Angeles Turf Club, responded within days by [filing a writ of mandate](#) in Los Angeles Superior Court. [The lawsuit](#) seeks the immediate return of the machines and the seized funds, along with a judicial declaration that wagers placed through the terminals are lawful. Santa Anita argues that the [machines use a 3x3 wagering format](#) that requires selecting the top three finishers in three races, a structure approved by the California Horse Racing Board in April 2024. The [track maintains](#) that automating this approved pari-mutuel wager for concluded races does not render it illegal. The petition also challenges the warrantless seizure as an abuse of discretion and alleges that regulators met repeatedly with track officials in 2024 and 2025 without raising concerns about the machines' legality.

The dispute reflects broader tensions over the financial future of horse racing in California. Santa Anita argues that Racing on Demand machines are necessary to [supplement purses and stabilize the industry](#), pointing to states such as Kentucky, where historical [horse racing has generated substantial revenue](#). California tribal nations oppose the machines, contending they function as illegal slot devices that infringe on tribal gaming exclusivity. The outcome of the litigation is widely viewed



as a test of whether California racing can access similar revenue mechanisms or will remain constrained by existing gambling limits.

## INSECTS AND POLLINATORS

### Trafficking in Insects and a Proposal for a Green Criminological Lens

An international wildlife smuggling case out of Kenya, involving 5,000 queen Giant African Harvester ants, has drawn attention to the [trafficking of insects](#).

By: Suzanne Lachelier

Four men were arrested at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi in April 2025 [with 5,000 live ants](#), each in a modified test tube. Native to East Africa, these ants are the world's largest species of harvester ant, making them a valuable target. Charged with violations of Kenya's Wildlife Conservation and Management Act, two of the men were [sentenced](#) to a \$7,700 fine, or one year in prison; the other two received similar sentences.

The case demonstrates a growing shift in the illegal wildlife trade that increasingly targets smaller animals, including [spiders, millipedes, and scorpions](#). This shift is happening as entomologists estimate a [worldwide loss of 10 to 20% of all insect species](#) each decade. With 7 million known species, invertebrates comprise 80% of the world's animals; [among other key roles](#), they are part of food chains and pollinate plants.

The regulation of the insect trade is, however, neglected. The volume and anonymity offered by online sales contribute to the regulatory challenges. The Cornell University Department of Entomology has documented the widespread [illegal marketing of insects and spiders on the web](#). Searching online, the researchers found 79 species for sale that are listed on the [Appendices to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\)](#), the [International Union for the Conservation of Nature's \(IUCN\) "Red List,"](#) or the [U.S. Endangered Species list](#).

Responding to the case in Kenya, some scholars are advocating for examining the insect trade through a ["green criminological lens."](#) This approach brings a more inclusive legal definition of regulated animals that considers the harms and negative impact on the environment and non-human nature, rather than solely the legality of an activity. The focus is on the social harm caused, how to repair that harm through policies and the justice system, and includes considering non-human nature as a crime victim.



In sentencing the men in Kenya, the court seemed implicitly to recognize the notion of a green criminological lens when it said “[Our wildlife, from ants to elephants, sustains our ecosystems and national heritage.](#)”

## INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

### Thailand’s Flat-Headed Cats Rediscovered after Feared Extinct

For almost thirty years, scientists lacked confirmed evidence that the flat-headed cat still existed in Thailand, and many feared the species had disappeared entirely. [Flat-headed cats](#) are the smallest wild cat in Southeast Asia, weighing around 4.5 pounds. They are very elusive and adapted to life in dense peat swamp forests and wetlands, where thick vegetation and water make sightings difficult.

Recently, [remote cameras have obtained evidence](#) that flat-headed cats are indeed still living in Thailand. Photographs from 2025 and 2024 captured multiple flat-headed cats in southern Thailand’s Princess Sirindhorn Wildlife Sanctuary, including a mother with her cub, marking the first confirmed sightings since the mid-1990s. This rediscovery confirms that flat-headed cats have been surviving undetected in these remote wetlands, even as their habitat has been squeezed by [human-driven pressures](#). The sightings give conservationists hope that a breeding population persists in Thailand’s forests.

[Threats](#) to the cats include habitat loss, pollution, and disease. The conservation group [Panthera](#) has also noted that now this information is public, the cats may be at greater risk from wildlife traffickers targeting the area. Strong protections for flat-headed cats and their habitat are more important than ever, especially since this area may be home to the last remaining population of flat-headed cats in the country. 

**By: Vanessa J. Kranz**



## Legislative And Regulatory Developments Affecting Animals

### ANIMALS IN AGRICULTURE

#### Animal Rights Advocates Celebrate the End of the Milk Mandate

By: Cynthia von Schlichten

A victory for farmed animal advocates has come from an unexpected place. On January 14, 2026, President Trump signed the [Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025](#) (“the Act”) into law. On its face, the Act seems contrary to farmed animal rights advocacy, as it allows schools participating in the [National School Lunch Program](#) (“NSLP”) to expand their dairy offerings to now include whole and 2% milk, alongside lower fat dairy counterparts.

However, you can’t judge a book by its cover. While the passage of the Act does bring additional dairy milk offerings to the NSLP, it also [abolishes the milk mandate provision](#) that has been in place for 80 years. Prior to the passage of the Act, school districts that wished to participate in the NSLP had to abide by a provision that forced schools to push dairy as the only real beverage option for students who participate in the program. School districts were actually denied reimbursement for the costs of meal offerings unless each school provided dairy milk for every student receiving meals under the program, regardless of dietary preference or the fact that approximately [one third of Americans are lactose intolerant](#).

In addition to higher fat dairy milk, schools can now offer children a [non-dairy option](#) that the Food and Drug Administration determines to be [nutritionally sound](#) and still receive reimbursement under the NSLP. The Act is set to take effect immediately.

### ANIMALS IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

#### Replace Animal Tests Act of 2025 Introduced in U.S. Congress

By: Monica Engebretson

U.S. Congressman Jared Moskowitz recently introduced a new bill to reduce animal testing by requiring the use of scientifically valid non-animal methods, where such methods are available. The [Replace Animal Tests Act of 2025 \(H.R. 6660\)](#) would apply across federal regulatory agencies, including the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration.



The bill would make it unlawful for any regulated entity to submit data to these agencies that is derived from an animal test method where a non-animal test method is available to meet the regulatory requirement, or where the agency has issued a waiver exempting the entity from a requirement for data derived from an animal test method.

The bill includes a few exemptions, including animal testing data generated before the enactment of the Act and data generated from an animal test method conducted outside the United States for the purpose of complying with a foreign regulatory requirement.

Covered agencies are empowered to either refuse to accept animal testing data generated in violation of the Act or to impose a civil penalty of not more than \$10,000 per violation.

In addition to mandating the use of accepted non-animal test methods, the bill would require agencies to provide clear guidance on approved non-animal methods and to publish annual reports on non-animal method usage and animal testing data, including the purpose for which animal tests were conducted. Where animal testing is still required, the bill would also require that the number of animals used and the pain inflicted be reduced to be minimised.

## COMPANION ANIMALS

### Recent Developments in Companion Animal Law

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Several bills were passed in California in the last few months that affect companion animals:

**By: Thomas Mugavero**

[Assembly Bill 506 \(CA AB506\)](#) requires that the source and the medical information of any dog, cat or rabbit be provided to the purchaser when sold to a California resident, and that any requirement of a non-refundable deposit on the purchase of such animals is void as of public policy.

[Assembly Bill 519 \(CA AB519\)](#) prohibits the sale of any dog, cat or rabbit that is less than one year old. Animal shelters, rescue groups, and transfers of service or guide dogs are exempted from this prohibition.

[Senate Bill 312 \(CA SB312\)](#) altered the certification requirements for bringing a dog into California for purposes of resale or change of ownership. The previous law required that the seller obtain a health certificate for the dog that is completed by a licensed veterinarian and dated within 10 days before the dog is brought into the



state. That certificate had to be submitted to the applicable county health department. The new law requires the certificate to be submitted to the Department of Food and Agriculture. The change would essentially create a state-mandated local program, and would make violation of the requirement a misdemeanor.

Finally, [Senate Bill 221 \(CA SB221\)](#) changes the criminal statute on stalking. The existing law would find a person guilty of stalking if that person made a credible threat with the intent to harm the victim or the victim's immediate family. The new law expands the definition of "credible threat" to mean:

"a verbal or written threat, including a threat performed through the use of an electronic communication device, or a threat implied by a pattern of conduct or a combination of verbal, written, or electronically communicated statements and conduct, **including threats to a person's pet, service animal, emotional support animal, or horse**, made with the intent to place the person that is the target of the threat in reasonable fear for their safety ..." (emphasis added).

Violation of the statute could result in imprisonment for one year and/or a fine of \$1,000. Repeat offenders, or those who engage in stalking when a restraining order is in place, could face two to five years' imprisonment.

## DIVERSITY EQUITY INCLUSION JUSTICE

### New Federal Law Expands Equitable Access to Milk and Nondairy Beverage Options in U.S. Schools

On November 20, 2025, by unanimous consent, the U.S. Senate passed [S.222](#), the "Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025," and on January 14, 2026, President Trump signed the bill into law. S.222 amends the current requirements that the National School Lunch Act must follow to provide milk in schools. Prior to the amendments, USDA's regulations required milk served in schools to be "fat-free or low-fat and allow milk to be flavored or unflavored."

Now, the [restrictions](#) are modified to allow schools to offer an additional variety of milk products such as, "flavored and unflavored organic or nonorganic whole, reduced-fat, low-fat, and fat-free fluid milk and lactose free fluid milk, and nondairy beverages that are nutritionally equivalent to fluid milk and meet the nutritional standards established by the Secretary (which shall, among other requirements to be determined by the Secretary, include fortification of calcium, protein, vitamin A, and vitamin D to levels found in cow's milk)."

By: Kynsee Fennel



In addition, students will no longer need a written statement from a licensed physician for their school to provide a nondairy substitute. Now, a parent or legal guardian is sufficient to provide a written statement for the school. However, the milk substitutes “must be fortified in accordance with fortification guidelines issued by the Food and Drug Administration.”

The implementation of the amendments began immediately upon being enacted, and the [USDA](#) has simultaneously provided program implementation guidance for the National School Lunch Program.

## EQUINE LAW

### Parallels in Animal Welfare: Horse Sensory Hair Bans and the Dog Cosmetic Surgery Debate

As someone who has bred and shown dogs for over 45 years and participated in horse shows, the Federation Equestre Internationale’s (FEI) new [2025 veterinary regulations](#) represent a watershed moment in animal welfare policy. Effective January 1, 2025, FEI prohibits horses from competing if sensory hairs (vibrissae) have been clipped or removed, specifically banning trimming of whiskers around the muzzle and ear auricles and restricting leg hair clipping during competition periods. [These changes](#) acknowledge that sensory hairs serve critical protective and navigational functions, not merely cosmetic purposes, even though trimming has been performed purely for aesthetic presentation in the show ring.

The FEI regulations are particularly significant because they represent international consensus, with [Germany](#), [Switzerland](#), and [France](#) banning whisker trimming in 2014, 2019 and 2025, respectively. The FEI’s regulations extend this protection globally across all FEI-sanctioned competitions, with disqualification as the penalty. The scientific basis is clear: equine vibrissae are highly innervated sensory organs with their own blood and nerve supply, helping horses navigate blind spots, judge safe distances from objects, detect air currents, and protect their eyes through reflexive blinking. Two articles found that [whiskers left on](#) a show or work horse’s muzzle can cause irritation. Raising concerns about enforcement of the new regulations, [the U.S. Equestrian Federation \(USEF\) stated](#), “It should be considered that when sensory hairs around the eye are left at full natural length, they can become tangled or trapped in the blinkers (blinders) of the driving bridle and potentially cause discomfort.” As we can see, no solution here is perfect.

**By: Debra Hamilton**



This equestrian precedent parallels longstanding debates in the dog fancy. Like many exhibitors, I've routinely trimmed feet and whiskers on my Irish Setters, Longhaired Dachshunds, and English Cocker Spaniels, standard grooming for the show ring that also helps older dogs avoid slipping. While ear cropping, tail docking, and dewclaw removal remain legal in most U.S. states despite [AVMA opposition](#), these procedures are banned throughout much of Europe under similar animal welfare reasoning. Several European countries now prohibit whisker trimming in dogs, classifying it as "temporary amputation" of a functional sensory organ. A March 2025 peer-reviewed study in [Scientific Reports](#) confirms canine vibrissae are highly innervated sensory organs essential for navigation and protection, anatomically and functionally identical to equine vibrissae.

The equine community's experience offers valuable lessons for companion animal law. FEI's decision demonstrates that major international sporting organizations can prioritize animal welfare over deeply entrenched aesthetic traditions while maintaining breed standards and competitive excellence. Notably, the regulations allow for medical necessity exemptions and don't prohibit all grooming; they create specific, science-based parameters.

I understand the deep emotional investment on all sides of these discussions. For those of us who have dedicated decades to our breeds and disciplines, presentation standards represent more than aesthetics, they embody heritage, artistry, and commitment to breed or discipline standards. We've carefully groomed countless animals with genuine love and respect. Simultaneously, the emerging scientific evidence about sensory function deserves our sincere attention.

Perhaps the path forward lies not in adversarial positions, but in honest dialogue honoring both traditional standards and biological needs. As this equine precedent influences companion animal legislation, proactive collaboration within our communities could shape outcomes that genuinely serve both our beloved breeds and the individual animals we cherish.

## INSECTS AND POLLINATORS

### Peruvian Municipalities Grant Legal Rights to Native Bees in a World First

For the first time, [an insect has been granted legal rights](#). Two Peruvian municipalities, Satipo and Nauta, have approved an ordinance granting legal rights to native stingless bees. The oldest bee species on the planet, they are responsible

**By: Tonya Plank**



for pollinating over 80% of Amazonian flora including important crops like coffee, chocolate, avocados, and blueberries.

The ordinances recognize the bees' rights to exist and thrive, maintain healthy populations, enjoy a habitat free from pollution, have ecologically stable climatic conditions, regenerate their natural cycles, and to receive legal representation in cases of threat or harm.

The legislation resulted from a collaboration among Indigenous leaders, scientists, and environmental advocates. It was supported by a joint report from [Amazon Research Internacional](#) and the [Earth Law Center](#), documenting the threats to the bees from deforestation, pesticides, habitat loss, and climate change, and underscoring how the bees' decline directly affects regeneration of Amazonian forests, biodiversity, continuity of Indigenous knowledge, sustainable livelihoods, and global food security. [Scientists](#) have also found that the bees support biological and medicinal properties.

Conservation organizations hope the ordinances will establish mandates for habitat reforestation, strict regulation of pesticides and herbicides, and mitigation of climate change impacts, and aim to use the legislation to propel the protection of the bees throughout Peru. [Groups in Bolivia, the Netherlands, and the US](#) have shown strong interest in using the legislation to advocate for the rights of their own wild bees.

## INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

### Poland, Europe's Largest Fur Producer, Bans Fur Farming

On December 2, 2025, Poland, Europe's largest fur producer, became the [24th European country](#) to [ban](#) or restrict fur farming. In October, Poland's Parliament [approved](#) the ban, with cross-party support from nearly three-quarters of lawmakers in the Sejm. President Karol Nawrocki then signed the legislation into law, amending Poland's Animal Protection Act. A November 2025 poll showed [strong public support](#) for the ban.

The [legislation](#) bans new fur farms immediately and creates an eight-year transition period for Poland's roughly 200 existing farms, which have until December 31, 2033, to cease operations. The government is offering compensation to producers that close within the first five years. Producers who apply and close their farms earlier in the process will receive more compensation. The legislation also provides 12 months of severance pay to producers' employees, to assist them in transitioning to

By: Krista Wirth



new work. The ban applies to all animals bred and raised commercially for their fur, except rabbits.

The ban comes not long after a detailed report by the [European Food Safety Authority](#) concluded that reforms to meet basic animal welfare needs were not possible in the current cage system. The system confines animals to small, barren cages, which significantly restricts animals' movement and prevents animals from engaging in species-specific behaviors essential to their health and well-being. Approximately [3.4 million animals](#), including minks, foxes, chinchillas, and raccoon dogs, currently live in Polish fur farms.

Meanwhile, the European Commission is considering the [Fur Free Europe European Citizens' Initiative](#), signed by more than 1.5 million people, which calls for a ban on fur farming and farmed fur products throughout the EU market. ➤

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# ANIMAL LAW DOCKET

## Practice Tips For Animal Law Cases

### How Many Roads Must a Dog Walk Down Before You Call Her a Sentient Being?

The title of this article paraphrases one of the most famous and universally-heard clarion calls for an evaluation and re-examination of societal views on civil rights, race relations, war and discrimination.<sup>1</sup> In the Sixties and Seventies (and maybe still now), “Blowin’ in the Wind” represented a lyrical demand for thought, for consideration of different viewpoints, and for a sea change in the way we humans treat each other. But if the lyrics of the song were changed just slightly, to substitute animals for humans, it could easily be the national anthem of the modern animal protection movement. And it would fit in very well in this edition of the ALC newsletter, which is focused on raising consciousness, building relationships, and making a difference for animals and people.

This article looks briefly and broadly at some of the positive changes that have occurred for animals through the development of animal law, how the field has been integrated into virtually every relevant area of society, and what it will take to continue this path forward. Specifically, what steps have been and can be taken so that animal lawyers carry out our collective goals of greater recognition of animals’ feelings and welfare, and protection of their interests.

The work that has proven most effective in changing the public’s mindset, buying trends, and general feeling towards animals has been the introduction and adoption of steady and measured changes in the law. This has happened in Congress and state legislatures across the country, with laws providing further protection to animals, and increasing the health and welfare for animals in shelters and those in agricultural production. It has happened in courtrooms, where cases involving animal cruelty, and the effective defense of the legislative changes for animals, have established important precedents that begin to establish the parameters and legality of widespread behavioral change among American consumers and American businesses. It has happened in academia, where more and more law schools are teaching eager students animal law, and where a few dedicated animal law programs have been established and continue to flourish. It has happened in the marketplace, with consumers voting with their wallets for more humane products,

[Read more on page 35](#)

**By: Bruce A. Wagman**

*Riley Safer Holmes & Cancila*

*Bruce Wagman is a lawyer with Riley Safer Holmes & Cancila with an almost exclusive practice in animal law (litigation, legislative drafting, education, and counseling), representing both individuals and animal protection organizations. He teaches animal law at three Bay Area law schools, is coeditor of the Animal Law casebook, soon to be in its sixth edition, and the 2017 book Wildlife Law and Ethics, and coauthor of A Global Worldview of Animal Law, published in 2011.*



## Difference-Making Lawyering From The Heart

*“There is no greater reward than working from your heart and making a difference in the world.” – Carlos Santana*

*“You cannot hope to build a better world without improving the individuals [in it]. To that end each of us must work for his or her own improvement.”*

*– Marie Curie*

“Raising consciousness, building relationships and making a difference for animals and people” is the essence of our good work and good works through the Animal Law Committee, within Animal Law generally, and in our own lives. Every day. Beginning with our own understanding, we lift awareness about animals and our fellow living beings. We encounter and grow together with others purposefully doing good. Through adversities and triumphs, we diligently persevere and are grateful that the investment of putting our hearts into these endeavors matters and makes a difference.

Reflecting on this theme underlying our ABA year together, and this special newsletter edition, has made me realize that this is where 36 plus years of practicing Animal Law has brought me. The evolution of my heart and mind over the course of this still unfolding journey has yielded many precious insights. The review that follows is some of what life has taught me. Like Michelangelo said towards the end of his life, “I am still learning”. Thankfully, all of you are good and patient teachers with this particular student!

### 1. A break can lead to a change in perspective which changes everything.

*“Your perspective is all that ever really needs to change.” – Karen Casey*

In the late 1980s, a “burnt out, highly stressed” young lawyer being well-compensated to work very hard had unknowingly lost perspective. A week with dolphins and cancer patients/survivors (all of whom were women) changed that. These ladies were confronting their own mortality with strength, courage and dignity. It was incredible to behold their grace and joyful living in this moment. This was humbling and put my challenges and worries in perspective.

*Read more on page 38*

**By: James Gesualdi**

*James F. Gesualdi, P.C.*

*James F. Gesualdi is the ALC Chair and an animal law attorney in private practice spanning over 35 years. He is the author of EXCELLENCE BEYOND COMPLIANCE Enhancing Animal Welfare Through the Constructive Use of the Animal Welfare Act. He has published other numerous articles including as a regular contributing columnist to the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance Academy's e-Newsletter (Getting Better All the Time) on continuous improvement and advancing animal interests, protection, and well-being for ten years. Mr. Gesualdi was a former Special Professor of Law, Hofstra University School of Law, taught Animal Law, and has lectured extensively on constructive approaches to building consensus and fostering transformative, sustainable change to better serve animals. He served as Chair of the New York State Bar Association Committee on Animals and the Law and was the founding Co-Chair, Suffolk County Bar Association Animal Law Committee. He was a Vice Chair of the American Bar Association's first Animal Law committee and The Young Lawyers' Division Animal Protection Committee. Mr. Gesualdi was the inaugural recipient of the New York State Bar Association Committee on Animals and the Law Exemplary Service Award (2018), and recipient of the American Bar Association, Tort Trial and Insurance Practice Section, Animal Law Committee Excellence in the Advancement of Animal Law Award (2019).*



## Anatomy of a Successful Resolution

One of the greatest strengths of the Animal Law Committee (“Committee”) is its track record of developing and passing impactful resolutions. Since the Committee’s founding in 2005, our members have championed a diverse array of animal protection issues, resulting in 16 successful resolutions<sup>1</sup> now enshrined as American Bar Association (ABA) Policy. These victories provided an invaluable foundation for the Committee’s most recent success: Resolution 25M504 (“Resolution 504”) to protect people and companion animals from domestic violence.<sup>2</sup>

In celebration of the first anniversary of Resolution 504’s adoption by the ABA House of Delegates on February 3, 2025, this article pulls back the curtain on the resolution process. We share how relationship-building and collaboration served as the cornerstone of the work of the Companion Animal Subcommittee (“Subcommittee”). While we “name names”, we do so to highlight the magnitude of teamwork required for success, all the while recognizing the inherent risk that we may inadvertently omit important contributors, including those who worked behind the scenes. We nonetheless hope this article serves as a helpful guide and underscores the importance of collaboration for those pursuing future ABA animal law resolutions.

### ABA Resolutions 101

The ABA establishes formal policy through resolutions. Resolutions become ABA policy only after they are formally adopted by a vote of the ABA House of Delegates at the Mid-Year or Annual Meeting. The ABA’s website offers an essential overview of this policy-making body:

The House of Delegates drafts, debates and votes on resolutions that establish Association policy on professional and public issues. It represents not only various groups within the Association, but also the legal profession as a whole, and includes delegates from state, local and specialty bars. It is the ultimate governing body of the Association.<sup>3</sup>

The ABA has adopted a wide range of resolutions. Visit the ABA [digital library of resolutions](#) adopted since 1997 and you’ll see that there are more than 2,500 resolutions as of the date of this article.<sup>4</sup>

[Read more on page 43](#)

**By: Megan Senatori and Thomas Mugavero**

*Megan Senatori and Thomas Mugavero are co-chairs of the TIPS Animal Law Committee Companion Animal Subcommittee. Megan is Executive Director of the Center for Animal Law Studies (CALS) at Lewis & Clark Law School where she leads CALS’ strategic priorities, innovative programming, and long-term growth initiatives aimed at strengthening animal law education and expanding protections for animals. Thomas serves as Counsel with Whiteford in their Community Associations group where his practice focuses on civil litigation covering a wide range of issues, including discrimination and fair housing claims, director liability and premises liability. They can be reached at [megansenatori@lclark.edu](mailto:megansenatori@lclark.edu) and [tmugavero@whitefordlaw.com](mailto:tmugavero@whitefordlaw.com).*





## Supporting Communities' Animal Advocacy Work

### Introduction: The Article's Context

For this special issue newsletter, the Animal Law Committee asked me to submit an article that discusses collaborations with communities that have allowed my team to work with them, to support their animal advocacy. I realized the best engagement with this prompt was to use the article as space for consenting members of those communities (the contributors) to share their recommendations regarding methods that make such collaborations successful. In turn, this article's format is unconventional; its content derives from those contributors' observations and anecdotes.

The contributors come from different geographic locations within, or that neighbor, the United States' (U.S.) political borders, with emphasis from contributors who live within some of the U.S. territories or who are associated with specific Indigenous Nations.<sup>1</sup> The contributors also come from diverse professional backgrounds—some are private citizens, law enforcement agents, government officials, or defense-minded advocates. They are individuals who understand which resources, information, advocacy strategies, and community-focused solutions are necessary to empower their neighbors and loved ones. These contributors are some of the many advocates who make powerful inroads, to protect their communities' human and animal residents. However, many of their communities do not receive the fairness, compassion, partnership engagement, or resources from the U.S. federal government or its agencies,<sup>2</sup> neighboring state governments or their agencies,<sup>3</sup> or mainstream U.S. society<sup>4</sup> they deserve.

I hope this article facilitates an opportunity for deep conversations about developing genuine partnerships between its readers who may be advocates who work with, or within, mainstream-based animal advocacy organizations (AAOs), and communities that exist beyond mainstream cultures. This article's insight is inexhaustive, especially since it is framed within an animal advocacy context. The contributors and their communities have taught me time and again that, if not already doing so, AAOs must evolve their perspectives toward communities that do not share the AAOs' cultural infrastructure, if they want to do right by the people and animals of the communities this article strives to honor.

[Read more on page 50](#)

### Coordinated by:

**Jessica A. Chapman**

*Animal Legal Defense Fund*

*Jessica A. Chapman JD, LLM is a staff attorney with the Animal Legal Defense Fund's Criminal Justice Program. For this article's contextual transparency, she identifies as a white woman, who is not a citizen of an Indigenous Nation nor a resident of a U.S. territory. The views expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Animal Legal Defense Fund or any client. This article is published for informational purposes only and is not legal advice.*





Student Spotlight

## Law As A Second Career: Turning Experience Into Purpose

Entering the legal profession later in life can feel like a significant transition, but many attorneys discover that a first career is not an obstacle. Instead, it often provides the strongest foundation for professionalism, judgment, and purpose. I am currently a mid-thirties law student and second-career professional. My path to the law began through years of work in recreation and aquatics, construction management, and social media and marketing. Those experiences shaped the professional identity I bring into my legal work today. In my marketing career, I worked in corporate turnaround, including with Chapter 7 and Chapter 13 bankruptcy clients, and learned to communicate with people in difficult, emotional situations. My work exposed me to the realities of loss, responsibility, and client management. Those insights are central to how I now advocate for clients.

During my years working in Chapter 7 and Chapter 13 bankruptcy, I often met clients at some of the most difficult moments of their lives. Individuals and families came to me overwhelmed by financial collapse, creditor pressure, and the emotional burden of starting over. Navigating those cases taught me how to address complex problems quickly and professionally, communicate calmly with distressed clients, and find practical solutions in situations that often felt impossible to them. Those experiences showed me what it means to guide people through a crisis with empathy, structure, and clear information. The skills I developed in bankruptcy case management continue to grow in law school, where I now apply the same problem-solving, client-centered communication, and sound judgment to my legal coursework, clinic work, and future practice.

Entering law school with a wide range of experiences provided clarity about what I did not want. My years in bankruptcy and crisis management taught me that I did not want to pursue a legal career in criminal law or bankruptcy law. I knew I wanted to work in agriculture, environmental, or animal-related fields. When my law school offered courses in Agriculture Law and Animal Law, I enrolled in both. During my first semester of eligibility, I applied for the only externship with an “animal” in its name, the Indiana Horse Racing

[Read more on page 62](#)

**By: Johannah Anderson**

*Johannah Anderson is a third-year J.D. candidate at Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law. Her work focuses on animal law and regulatory policy, with particular attention to animal welfare, administrative enforcement, and constitutional limits on modern regulatory regimes. She serves as Law Student Vice Chair of the ABA TIPS, where she was appointed to the Animal Law Committee, and as Law Student Chair of the ABA Animal Law Committee's Equine Law Subcommittee. At McKinney, she is President of the Veteran and Military Student Association, Treasurer of the Environmental Law Society, and previously served as founder and President of the AccessABILITY Student disability organization.*





The Animal Law Conversation

## An Interview with Jake Davis

***What does your role as Senior Staff Attorney at the Nonhuman Rights Project (NhRP) entail? What is a typical day like for you?***

I'm responsible for several ongoing cases, as well as prospective research for future cases. Some days I will work on entries for our organizational blog; sometimes on requests from our communications team but those are fewer and farther between. Depending on the day, I could be drafting a brief; I could be preparing for oral argument; or I could be undertaking your basic legal research, whether in support of a case I am developing or in support of a colleague. Oftentimes I am also collaborating with my Litigation Director, Liddy Stein. The details vary, but my days are very much those of an attorney.

***NhRP is a really small organization working on some really important, novel legal issues. What are the major challenges?***

Candidly, the biggest challenge is convincing courts to agree with our arguments. Although I believe it's only a matter of time before a court agrees with us, no two cases are the same. We're always refining our arguments and looking for ways to be more effective advocates. The challenge is the art of persuasion. Ultimately, we believe our legal arguments can withstand scrutiny, but the problem is courts continue to take adversarial positions that lack persuasive value. To some judges, the issues we raise are frightening. What would the world look like if we gave a chimpanzee or an elephant a fundamental right to liberty they often muse? In reality, the world will look exactly the same tomorrow, but not everyone thinks about our claims practically. For example, we often hear opposing counsel, and judges, characterize our efforts as seeking *human rights* for nonhuman animals. However, we are not after multiple legal rights, we are merely seeking a single fundamental right that would allow some elephants and chimpanzees to live closer to what nature intended for them.

If the tomorrow we envision arrived, the harsh reality is that there would still be immense suffering, immense cruelty. There would be exploitation of elephants and chimpanzees the world over. But our clients, whether it's a single nonhuman animal or a half dozen, would be on their way to their native and ancestral lands, or, alternatively, on their way to an accredited sanctuary. And so, our biggest challenge is trying to help courts understand our requested relief is actually quite modest.

***How do you keep going when so often the courts don't agree with your arguments?***

I attribute a large part of my answer to my background in athletics. I played varsity basketball through college. We didn't win all our games. When we did lose, I would



**Jake Davis**

*Nonhuman Rights Project (NhRP)*

*Jake Davis is a Senior Staff Attorney for the Nonhuman Rights Project (NhRP) based in Alaska and licensed in Alaska and Colorado. He is the lead attorney for the NhRP's Hawaii and Pennsylvania litigation. Previously, Jake worked in federal court (under the Honorable S. James Otero of the United States District Court for the Central District of California), in state court (under the Honorable Robert B. Allison of Montana's 11th Judicial District Court), for the U.S. government (at the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of California), and in private practice (Squire Patton Boggs). He holds a J.D. from Loyola Law School, Los Angeles, and a B.A. from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. He is a proud human to a rescued pitbull dog named Archie.*

### Interview By:

**Kailey McNeal**

*Kailey McNeal serves as one of the Young Lawyer Vice Chairs for the TIPS Animal Law Committee. She is a second-year associate at Jones Day in the Washington, D.C. office. Kailey also serves on the TIPS Standing Committee on Diversity and Inclusion. Please email [mwistara@aldf.org](mailto:mwistara@aldf.org) or [kaileymcneal@gmail.com](mailto:kaileymcneal@gmail.com) with questions or suggestions for future interviews.*



be far more motivated in my preparation leading into the subsequent game. I try to approach litigation the same way. At the end of the day, I came to the NhRP because of my desire to help nonhuman animals. I remain in this practice because that desire has not wavered—just like the desire to win innate in high achieving athletes doesn't waver. Still, wins in this practice area are hard to come by and because of this, I try to balance anger and optimism as dual sources of motivation. Anger at the way nonhuman animals are treated, anger at courts that refuse to do what the law requires, and steadfast optimism that change will come. Because, like in sports, if you do the requisite preparation and stay in the game long enough, you will not lose every time.

***What accomplishment are you most proud of during your time at NhRP?***

I'm proud of publicly representing the voiceless. We have few opportunities for courtroom advocacy so it's incredibly important that we hold ourselves to the highest standards when those opportunities arise. I've received positive feedback for my oral advocacy and when I've spoken on behalf of the organization publicly and more generally. As a result, my pride is in playing a small but seemingly effective part in speaking for those who cannot speak for themselves. I was also published in the *Elgar Concise Encyclopedia of Animal Law* in 2025, and that was my first published work. Shoutout to Joan E. Schaffner for helping me contribute to that publication. Also, the BBC once published an article about hypothetical contact with extraterrestrials, and they quoted me in that article.

***You majored in film and media studies in college and then worked at a law firm right after law school. How did you get from there to animal law?***

Stepping back, my mom tells me that when I was very young, I used to make comments like, "I want to save animals" and "I want to help animals." Although I don't remember saying those things, what I do know is that there has always been a part of me that has wanted to help nonhuman animals. I don't know where it comes from or why it's within me, but most people have belief systems within them they cannot shake. I thought that working in film and media might provide me with an opportunity to advocate for nonhuman animals. I acquired an undergraduate degree in Film and Media Studies, and I worked in film for a few years after my undergraduate graduation. Two years into the job, I became disillusioned with the *lasting* impact film and media have on its viewers. So, what to do next? Eventually, I came to the conclusion (rightly or wrongly) that the only way you create lasting change is by changing what underlies that problem. For so many problems within our human societies, including the exploitation of nonhuman animals, the enabling factor is the law.




Under the law, nonhuman animals are classified as property; as our founder, the late Steve Wise, liked to say, nonhuman animals are “things.” Property, or “things,” do not have fundamental rights. You can do just about anything you want with your property. For example, I can tear my wall down. I can break my windows. I can rip up my carpets and put holes in my floor. The same is true of nonhuman animals: They are torn from their families by the zoo and aquarium industry, sport hunters, dairy farmers, laboratories, and for the “fashion” industry, to name a few examples. They are broken; they have their skin and extremities removed for commercial use; and they suffer through all of this in invisible silence. I hoped to try and do something that created a shift in what was causing this suffering. That is why I went to law school with the intention to one day advocate against at least some of these practices. However, I knew jobs in the animal advocacy space were virtually impossible to get right out of law school. So, I took a job with a firm that’s well-regarded, and I figured that if I did some volunteer projects while I was working in private practice, maybe the organizations I was helping would take notice. That’s exactly what happened with the NhRP.

### ***What advice do you have for aspiring young lawyers interested in animal law?***

My advice is simple. If you can, forget about post-graduate jobs entirely. Here’s why: To get the best possible job upon graduation, you must do your best possible work while you are in school. Doing the class work well and taking the best possible job available each summer and upon graduation will set you up nicely for a future in special interest litigation. Once in practice, reach out about volunteer opportunities. Almost everyone on the NhRP’s legal team started out as organizational volunteers. I did, and working as a volunteer for a year with the NhRP led to a job offer. Play the not-so-long game, continue to put yourself out there, and don’t be discouraged if you hear “no” or hear nothing at all. It’s not personal. Like most industries, it’s a matter of supply and demand.

Moreover, this is an incredibly small practice area. There is not always an opportunity, but in my experience, persistence pays off. I’m not exaggerating when I say I was incessant about emailing the NhRP. I sometimes joke that my then–Executive Director handed me a volunteer project simply to keep me from flooding their inbox. But in truth, the same insistence that helped me secure a volunteer project, then another, and finally employment with the NhRP has enabled me to keep pushing this work forward effectively.

So don’t lose heart. You are not alone in your frustration or in your hope. As long as there are lawyers persistently knocking on the door of the animal advocacy practice area, society will continue to move toward a more acceptable world for nonhuman animals. 



## NEW ALC MEMBER PROFILE



### Krista Wirth

For Krista Wirth, the path to animal law didn't begin in a lecture hall; it began at a local city shelter.

Krista, who originally studied health sciences as an undergraduate, discovered a new calling the day she adopted her second dog, Hope. Covered in scars and carrying the heavy weight of physical and emotional trauma, Hope was suspected to have been used as a fighting dog.

### By: Holly Spainhower

*Holly Spainhower is an attorney and animal advocate. She most recently served as a Law Scholar for Change at Mercy for Animals, where she supported in-house legal counsel and promoted federal policy initiatives to enhance farmed animal welfare. Previously, Holly spent eight years combating violence against women as an attorney at AEquitas. She resides in Virginia with her husband, son, and two rescue dogs.*

Hope's journey of recovery exposed Krista to both the depth of animal suffering and the resilience of the human-animal bond. That connection inspired a pivot from health sciences to the legal field. After auditing Professor Megan Senatori's Companion Animal Law class at Lewis and Clark's Center for Animal Law Studies, Krista's decision was solidified. She applied exclusively to law schools with robust animal law curricula, ultimately landing at Vermont Law and Graduate School, where she graduated *summa cum laude* in January.

"I am drawn to every aspect of animal law," Krista says. "Whether it is litigation, policy, or academia, I really do enjoy it all."

### Scholarship and Advocacy

At Vermont Law, Krista wasted no time immersing herself in the field. Her first animal law class, *Animals and the Law* with Professor Delcianna Winders, was an "incredible experience" that led to Krista serving as a research assistant at Vermont's Animal Law and Policy Institute.

Her academic writing has tackled under-regulated industries, including a publication in the *Animal and Natural Resource Law Review* arguing for professional licensing requirements for dog trainers.

"Just like behavioral health for humans, dog trainers should have a robust understanding of a dog's learning process and the harms that can be done if they train dogs the wrong way," Krista notes.



Her most recent scholarship focuses on an issue that hits close to home: the housing crisis for people with companion animals. As a longtime companion to Doberman Pinscher rescues, Krista has personally navigated the hurdles of breed-specific restrictions in housing.

“The bar for housing is so much harder when you live with an animal,” she explains.

Her forthcoming article in *Animal Law Review* examines the conflict between the Fair Housing Act and state laws regarding emotional support animals (ESAs). Krista critiques laws that require a 30-day pre-existing relationship with a healthcare provider before a tenant can obtain necessary documentation for an ESA. She argues that these state-level hurdles do more than just target “fraudulent” ESAs; they effectively block access for individuals facing housing insecurity or gaps in medical care. Krista argues that these state laws should be federally preempted to ensure equal housing opportunity for all people with disabilities.

### A Focus on Access and Equity

Krista’s passion for access extends beyond housing. She currently serves on the Board of Directors for Animal Fix Clinic in the San Francisco Bay Area. The non-profit offers high-quality spay/neuter services and urgent surgical care on a sliding payment scale. This service is critical in the Bay Area, where nearly two million people struggle to meet basic needs.

“One in four people have trouble accessing or affording veterinary care,” Krista notes. Through her dedicated grant writing, she helps sustain the clinic’s commitment to never turn away a person and their beloved companion animal based on an inability to pay.

Krista’s dedication to equity is also evident in her leadership within the ABA. As a first-generation college and law student, Krista understands the importance of mentorship and outreach. She channeled this perspective into her role as a Law Student Vice Chair for the TIPS Animal Law Committee (ALC), where she worked to expand law student engagement and opportunities. This year as Diversity Vice Chair, Krista is coordinating the Animal Law Professionalism Series to highlight diverse career paths for students. She plans to collaborate with her fellow Vice Chairs to expand career development resources, offering practical support like mock interviews and resume reviews.

Krista also serves as the Chair of the ALC’s Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) Subcommittee. Under her leadership, the DEIJ Subcommittee has taken a broad approach, exploring intersections between animal law and social and



environmental justice issues, such as the pollution burdens of factory farms on low-income communities and increasing dietary inclusivity in K-12 schools.

## Looking Ahead

Currently, Krista is interning at the Animal Welfare Institute, where she is helping to advance state and federal legislation and funding priorities for animals in agriculture, laboratories, the wild, and more.

She plans to take the California Bar Exam this July and aims to pursue a career in animal law or policy. While Krista's professional interests are wide-ranging, she believes companion animals remain a vital touchstone for the movement.

"For many members of the public, companion animals are a gateway to understanding and having compassion for animals across the board," Krista says. "I'm hoping to help advance the status of companion animals for the benefit of all animals."

At the end of the day, Krista returns to the heart of her advocacy: enjoying life in the sunshine with Rayna, the rescue dog who has been her constant companion for the last four years. ➤



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*When Love... Continued from page 1*

The answer isn't better laws. It's a different process entirely. Alternative dispute resolution ("ADR"), mediation, collaborative practice, and other non-adversarial approaches offer something litigation never can: Outcomes that actually serve both the animals and the people who love them.

### Why the Courtroom Fails Animals

Consider what happens in a typical pet custody dispute. Two people who once shared their lives now face each other across a courtroom, each preparing to prove they're the superior caregiver. The pet sits at home, unaware that her entire world is about to change based on testimony and a judge's ruling.

Research shows that dogs form primary attachments and experience genuine distress from separation.<sup>4</sup> Studies of the human-animal bond demonstrate that people's attachment to pets mirrors attachment in other significant relationships.<sup>5</sup> When litigation severs these attachments, nobody wins. One person loses their pet entirely. The other "wins" but knows their former partner is heartbroken. The animal experiences disruption, tension, and possibly the complete loss of someone she loves. You see, unfortunately, your pet doesn't hate your ex.

Even courts recognize this reality. In *Travis v. Murray*, Judge Matthew F. Cooper wrote that "parties are, of course, always free, and in fact are encouraged, to informally make their own arrangements" about their pet, acknowledging that collaborative solutions serve everyone better than court orders.<sup>6</sup>

The failure of adversarial processes becomes even clearer in veterinary malpractice disputes. Research demonstrates that communication breakdowns, not clinical failures, underlie most veterinary complaints.<sup>7</sup> The grieving pet owner needs understanding and to feel heard. The veterinarian needs to explain clinical reasoning without facing career-ending consequences. Litigation gives neither party what they need.

Being named as a defendant in a malpractice lawsuit carries the same amount of grief and stress as the loss of a loved one, with studies showing that about 95% of physicians report significant emotional or physical reactions when sued.<sup>8</sup> Given veterinary medicine's suicide crisis,<sup>9</sup> any system that exacerbates professional distress ultimately harms animal welfare by driving compassionate veterinarians from practice. Mediation reframes the conversation from "Who's to blame?" to "What happened, and how can both parties find healing?"

*York State courts. She is certified as a mediator and collaborative professional and has worked with various court-based mediation programs in New York City (Queens-Community Mediation Service) and in Westchester and Rockland Counties in New York (Westchester and Rockland Mediation Centers). Debra is also an AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association) Certified Workplace Wellbeing Expert.*



## What ADR Offers That Litigation Cannot

A landmark twelve-year study by Robert Emery compared families randomly assigned to mediate versus litigate custody disputes and found:

- Mediated agreements showed significantly higher compliance, non-residential parents maintained substantially more contact, and relationships remained stronger over time.<sup>10</sup> While pets aren't children, the principles apply similarly. When people craft their own solutions, they honor them. For shared pet custody, this means arrangements that actually work.
- Beyond compliance rates, mediation offers significant cost savings compared to traditional litigation. For families in pet disputes, this means money for veterinary care and the animal's actual needs, not legal fees.
- The most important advantage isn't about money—it's about preserving the emotional bonds that matter. Mediation honors the profound grief people experience over pet-related conflicts while fostering healing. Litigation weaponizes it.

## How ADR Actually Works

The heart of effective animal ADR lies in reframing the question. Instead of “Who deserves this pet?” mediators ask, “What would serve this animal's well-being?” This shift, supported by attachment research,<sup>11</sup> reorients people toward collaboration.

I've watched divorcing spouses enter mediation ready for battle. Then we ask: “Would Max want you fighting over him? What would his perfect life look like?” Suddenly, they're not adversaries; they're just two people who love the same dog. In one case, a couple spent months and thousands fighting through attorneys. In two hours of mediation, they crafted shared custody based on their dog's car anxiety—he'd stay primarily at the familiar house with regular visits elsewhere. They left with an agreement and something resembling friendship.

Effective mediation employs interest-based negotiation, exploring underlying needs rather than positions.<sup>12</sup> This matters enormously because positions (“I want the dog”) obscure interests (companionship, routine, connection). Consider a neighbor dispute over barking. The positional conversation goes nowhere. But exploring interests reveals solutions: The night-shift worker needs daytime sleep; the dog has separation anxiety. Suddenly, adjusted schedules and behavioral training emerge naturally.



For veterinary disputes, mediation creates space for honest conversation. The veterinarian explains clinical decisions without fearing courtroom consequences. The pet owner expresses pain and asks questions without mounting legal attacks. Research shows structured dialogue improves outcomes and reduces distress for both parties.<sup>13</sup>

### **Beyond Custody: ADR for All Animal Conflicts**

The ADR imperative extends across all animal-related disputes:

- Neighbor disputes over barking dogs or free-roaming cats escalate through litigation into court orders that don't address root causes. Mediation allows practical solutions, adjusted schedules, training agreements, and environmental changes that preserve relationships while actually solving problems.
- Breeder-buyer conflicts over health guarantees or breeding rights become contentious because both parties love the animal. Mediation preserves relationships and allows flexible solutions that litigation's binary framework cannot accommodate.
- Service animal disputes force people with disabilities to become adversarial in the defense of their needs, a traumatic process. Mediation addresses behavioral concerns while protecting rights and crafting workable solutions.
- Estate disputes over pet trusts often reveal that fighting over "mom's dog" masks deeper grief or family conflicts, issues litigation cannot address but mediation can.

### **Making ADR Accessible**

Recommendations for making ADR more accessible in animal-related disputes:

- The nine states with pet custody legislation should integrate ADR through mandatory mediation referrals before courts decide pet placement.
- Family courts should establish specialized mediation panels.
- State veterinary associations should create peer review programs for complaints before they escalate to lawsuits.



Lawyers must consider changing how we counsel clients. Model Rule 2.1 requires candid advice.<sup>14</sup> This includes telling clients when litigation ill-serves their interests and their animal's welfare. When clients enter ready to fight, I tell them the truth: "You can fight in court or create something better for the animal you both love. Which actually serves your dog?"

Prevention matters too. Twenty-four percent of American couples now have "pet-nups," rising to 35% for Gen Z.<sup>15</sup> This represents an ADR mindset: Resolve conflicts before crisis. Yet a Securian Financial Group survey of pet owners found that fewer than half—just 44%—have made any written or verbal plans for their animals' future care, leaving a majority of pets legally unprotected should their owner become incapacitated or die.<sup>16</sup> Lawyers can facilitate these conversations through estate planning, prenups, or cohabitation contracts.

### Conclusion: What Your Pet Would Want

If our pets could speak, what would they tell us about how to resolve conflicts over them? They'd likely ask for peace among their humans, stability in their care, and love that transcends legal categories. They wouldn't want their people fighting in court, spending resources on lawyers instead of veterinary care, or destroying relationships that sustained the animal's sense of family.

The legislative revolution recognizing pets as family members represents progress. Yet legislation alone cannot solve the fundamental problem; adversarial litigation damages everyone involved. Extensive research confirms mediation's multiple advantages over litigation, including higher compliance rates, significant cost savings, relationship preservation, and greater party satisfaction.

As more states consider pet custody legislation, they should learn from the pioneers. Statutory framework matters less than ensuring ADR comes first. The real revolution won't be changing what courts can do; it will be changing how we resolve these deeply personal conflicts in the first place.

The question isn't "Who deserves this pet?" The question is "What would actually serve this animal and the people who love them?" ADR offers the best process to honestly answer that question. For the sake of our animals and ourselves, it's time we start there.



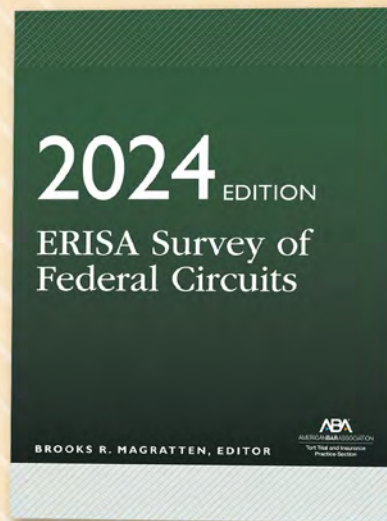
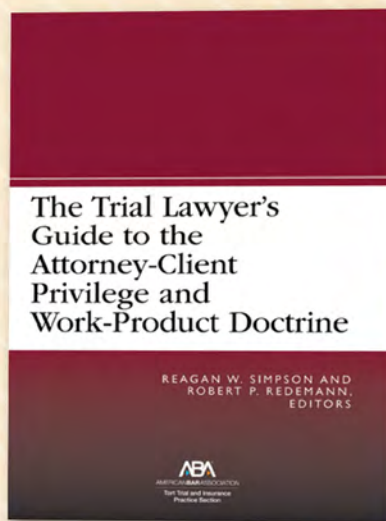
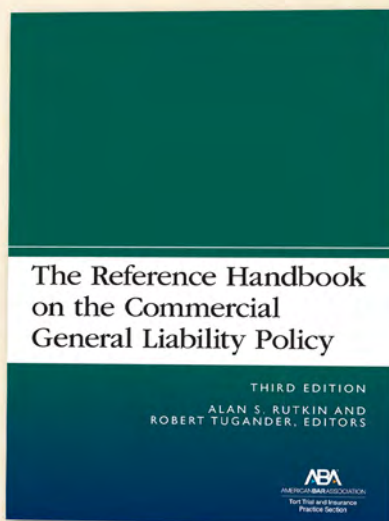
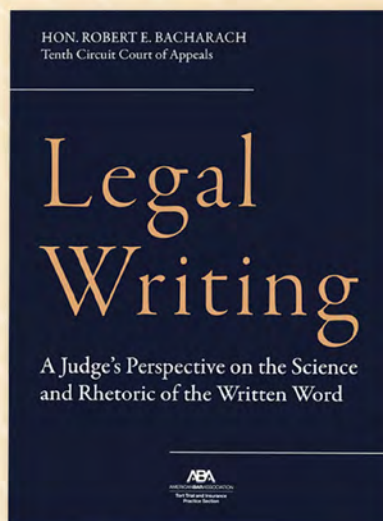
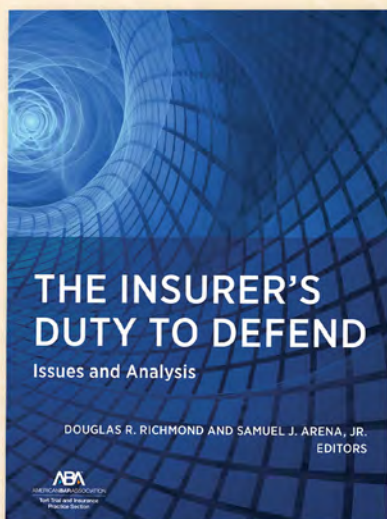
## Additional Resources:

- The American Veterinary Medical Law Association, <https://avmla.org>.
- ABA Dispute Resolution Section, [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/dispute\\_resolution/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/dispute_resolution/).
- DEBRA VEY VODA-HAMILTON, NIPPED IN THE BUD, NOT IN THE BUTT: HOW TO USE MEDIATION TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS OVER ANIMALS (2015).

## Endnotes

- 1 Alaska Stat. § 25.24.160 (2017); 750 ILL. COMP. STAT. 5/503(N) (2019); CAL. FAM. CODE § 2605 (2019); N.H. REV. STAT. § 458:16-A (2023); ME. STAT. tit. 19-A, § 953 (2024); N.Y. Dom. Rel. Law § 236 (2026); D.C. CODE § 16-910 (2024); DEL. CODE ANN. tit. 13 § 1513 (2025); 15 R.I. Gen. Laws § 15-5-30 (2024).
- 2 Governor Bill Walker signed Alaska's **HB 147** in October 2016, effective January 17, 2017, making Alaska the first state to require courts to consider an animal's well-being in custody disputes. Illinois followed on January 1, 2018, with mandatory language directing courts to "take into consideration the well-being of the companion animal." California Governor Jerry Brown signed **AB 2274** on September 27, 2018, effective January 1, 2019.
- 3 Pennsylvania's **House Bill 97** passed the House 121-82 in September 2025, awaiting Senate approval.
- 4 Elyssa Payne et al., *Current Perspectives on Attachment and Bonding in the Dog–Human Dyad*, 8 PSYCH. RESEARCH & BEHAV. MGMT. 71, 72 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S74972>.
- 5 Lisa Beck & Elizabeth A. Madresh, *Romantic Partners and Four-Legged Friends: An Extension of Attachment Theory to Relationships with Pets*, 21 ANTHROZOOS 43 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.2752/089279308X274056>.
- 6 *Travis v. Murray*, 42 Misc.3d 447, 460-61 n.6 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 2013), *superseded by statute*, N.Y. Dom. Rel. Law § 236 (2026), *as recognized in*, *L.B. v. C.C.B.*, 77 Misc.3d 429, 436 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 2022).
- 7 Jane R. Shaw et al., *Veterinarian-Client-Patient Communication During Wellness Appointments Versus Appointments Related to Health Problem in Companion Animal Practice*, 233 J. AM. VETERINARY MED. ASS'N 1576 (2008), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/8389438>.
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- 9 Gregory E. Skipper & Jerome B. Williams, *Failure to Acknowledge High Suicide Risk Among Veterinarians*, 39 J. VETERINARY MED. EDUC. 79 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.3138/jvme.0311.034R>.
- 10 Robert E. Emery et al., *Child Custody Mediation and Litigation: Custody, Contact, and Coparenting 12 Years After Initial Dispute Resolution*, 69 J. CONSULTING & CLINICAL PSYCH. 323 (2001), <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.69.2.323>.
- 11 Payne et al., *supra* note 4.
- 12 ROGER FISHER & WILLIAM URY, *GETTING TO YES: NEGOTIATING AGREEMENT WITHOUT GIVING IN* (2011).
- 13 Cindy L. Adams & Suzanne M. Kurtz, *Building on Existing Models from Human Medical Education to Develop a Communication Curriculum in Veterinary Medicine*, 33 J. VETERINARY MED. EDUC. 28 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.3138/jvme.33.1.28>.
- 14 MODEL RULES OF PRO. CONDUCT r. 2.1 (A.B.A. 2025).
- 15 See Sio Hornbuckle, *How Americans Pet Co-Parent in 2025*, KINSHIP (Aug. 28, 2025), <https://www.kinship.com/pet-lifestyle/pet-co-parenting-survey>.
- 16 Securian Financial Group Pet Owners Survey (2014), *as cited in*, Julie A. Back, *6 Estate Planning Tips for Pet Owners*, WEALTHSPIRE (May 4, 2023), <https://www.wealthspire.com/blog/estate-planning-tips-pet-owners/>.

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*How Many... Continued from page 18*

from cosmetics to meat and meat substitutes. And it has happened in the media, where more coverage is focusing on both the general attitude towards animals as well as specific scenarios and practices.

Thus it is clear that in contrast to the philosophical and academic focus on “personhood” or “animal rights,” which has generated some tangential discussion but no actual change, that the most successful efforts, those that have actually made a difference, have been carefully focused on changing the law, and people’s minds, so the world at large can begin to accept animal consciousness and support change that reflects that recognition.

It has taken some level of consensus and agreement in order to foster change of this magnitude, as well as some degree of defeating the opposition. But what has become most evident is the need to meet on some common ground on animal issues. How do we get a legislator, or a judge, or a media correspondent, or a special interest writer, or even a farmer, to take up the cause, in whatever way they can, given their positions? There are many different strategies for different situations, all with that same goal of changing attitudes, which will then lead to changed behaviors. For example, when we have a desire to improve the treatment of companion animals (dogs and cats mainly), we can assume that folks understand the connection between pet owners and their pets. Even if they are not animal lovers, or pet owners, they still do get the connection, and so it is important to bring the dog or cat “into the room” and into the conversation (not usually physically, but that doesn’t hurt), so that your audience feels the connection and the personality of individual pets, and hopefully is willing to act accordingly.

A few cogent examples illustrate how our work—from small to large projects—has a notable impact on the treatment of animals and our relationship to them. These snapshots demonstrate that real lasting change comes about through progressive, collective alteration of consciousness, in an effort to get people to join together over animal welfare.

Nowhere has the vision of change through collaboration (and compromise) and the wisdom of considering and even sometimes working with the other side, been so valuable and successful as the work that has been done in order to provide some relief around the inhumane treatment of the billions of animals that we rely on annually for food. Spearheaded by Humane World for Animals (but quickly and favorably joined by several other like-minded groups) the laws that eliminate cruel gestation crates for pregnant pigs, and torturous battery





cages for egg-laying hens have made the most positive change for farm animals. But what's more important for purposes of this present discussion, is that the victories and changes here (in the courts and all the way to the Supreme Court)<sup>2</sup> are definitely causing citizens, judges and lawmakers to start thinking about all animals in a different way than they had before.

In the companion animal area, the San Francisco SPCA is unequalled in its targeted efforts in the shelter law and companion animal law space. Its Shelter Policy and Legal Services ("Shelter PALS") program includes two (and soon three) lawyers working almost full-time to bring the causes most vital to animals who end up in shelters, and those in every home. But it takes a large village, and The Shelter PALS program relies heavily on its invaluable partnerships with the San Diego Humane Society, Humane World for Animals, the ASPCA, California Animal Welfare Association ("CalAnimals"), Best Friends Animal Society, the Michelson Found Animals Foundation, the California Veterinary Medical Association, and the California Veterinary Medical Board.

But besides policy change and work with the organizations above, the San Francisco SPCA's Shelter PALS program has developed a replicable, cost-effective way of servicing not just the SF SPCA, but over 100 shelters and rescues in California who get pro bono legal services for anything related to animal welfare. By providing these free legal services to shelters often operating on serious misconceptions and misunderstanding of the law, the San Francisco SPCA is bringing the shelter, rescue and pet owner communities together in order to foster a better world going forward for all California animals. In terms of building partnerships and expanding coverage, the Shelter PALS program could be replicated in any state, by any animal welfare group, to bring shelter workers and lawmakers, veterinarians and judges, animal control officers and the general public, all inside "the tent" in order to keep improving the lives of these animals. Shelter PALS answers questions about holding periods, veterinary care, compliance with welfare and cruelty laws—anything that will directly impact the animals—and by doing so, brings more and more partners onboard with positive change.


Working collaboratively on issues, setting aside differences and focusing on consensus and a sense of community among those who care most about these species has fostered a new paradigm for change for these animals with whom Americans are most familiar.<sup>3</sup> By brokering the sentiency and indisputable connection between these animals and us humans, the animals' lives become not so much an issue, but a foundation, of all the work that is being done in this field.

Another example of bringing the animals to the people is hallmarked by Project Chimps<sup>4</sup>, a chimpanzee sanctuary in north Georgia with nearly 100 chimpanzees



in residence, loved and supported by caregivers, expert veterinarians, and devoted management and facilities teams. All of the sanctuary's chimpanzees are retired from a biomedical research facility and, as Project Chimps' motto plainly states, "It's their time to live." While protecting the chimpanzees and restricting access to the public, Project Chimps also provides for guided tours and has regular public participation opportunities like their Discovery Days and "Chimp or Treat." Members of the public can also take a "Chimpcation" and spend a week as a volunteer at the sanctuary. This interaction and attraction, the collaboration and celebration, the important introduction to these amazing beings with internal lives as complex and fascinating as ours, all provide the base for exciting horizons where people view animals on a more equal plane than ever before.

A final nod must go to the scores of adjunct and full-time law school faculty teaching animal law to probably more than 1000 students every year. Many of these students enter their animal law classes with distorted notions of both the possibilities and the challenges presented by representing and working for animal interests. Some come in thinking they are going to be the ones to make the world vegan; others believe that direct rescue deserves to be recognized as a protected right; and many others just wonder what this course might be about. But all of them walk through that door of the classroom open to learn, and hopefully all leave with a much greater appreciation of just what sentience means, and that maybe we should be relying on the similarities, and not the differences, in how we treat animals.

The march forward continues: In 1985 a group of musicians got together and sang: "We can't go on pretending day by day that someone, somewhere will soon make a change. There comes a time when we heed a certain call."<sup>5</sup> To paraphrase Project Chimps' statement, "it's our time to give"—so that they can live better lives. Or maybe just focus on what it will take to give animals the rest and comfort they need, another question raised by the Bard in 1962: "How many seas must a white dove sail before she sleeps in the sand?"<sup>6</sup> 

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### Endnotes

- 1 BOB DYLAN, *Blowin' in the Wind*, ON THE FREEWHEELIN' BOB DYLAN (Columbia Records, 1963).
- 2 *National Pork Producers Council*, 598 U.S. 356 (2023).
- 3 Current estimates are that there are over 160 million dogs and cats in the U.S., with 94 million households sharing their homes with at least one pet. See *U.S. pet ownership statistics*, AM. VET VETERINARY MED. ASS'N, <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/reports-statistics/us-pet-ownership-statistics> (last visited Feb. 1, 2026).
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- 5 USA FOR AFRICA, *We Are the World*, ON WE ARE THE WORLD (Columbia Records, 1985).
- 6 BOB DYLAN, *supra* note 1.



*Difference-Making... Continued from page 19*

## 2. Love is the greatest inspiration and motivator.

This same week introduced me to an Atlantic bottlenose dolphin, *Tursiops truncatus*, named Little Bit. She was the last surviving “Flipper” from the original movie I had watched in the 1960s. I fell in love with her and would sit quietly mesmerized watching her. That love ignited a passion to act, help and discover how that desire might intersect with the law.



## 3. Grow in understanding of others, especially different perspectives.

Upon returning from this experience, immersion in the animal rights (and nascent Animal Law) literature, opened my mind to emotionally and intellectually compelling ideas. These points of view made me understand how some could view my life-changing experience differently and planted several seeds that have borne fruitful harvests in the ensuing work—focus on the animals themselves and how you can help, even incrementally, and always seek to truly understand (and improve from) different perspectives.

## 4. There is always something you can do to help.

Being a lawyer is a wonderful thing as we are a noble, service profession, always learning, and we can help in so many ways. Animals and people who care about and work with and for them have many challenges as there is so much that could be changed, improved or stopped. Find ways—little or simple ones—to start. Pro bono and volunteer work were one of the many avenues pursued, as were speaking and writing, to gain experience, insight, credibility, and creatively help make things better. It works.

## 5. Ask the right people, the right questions.

Over 30 years ago, another important contributing factor to growing a practice was asking key authorities, gatekeepers, leaders and others simple questions. What is something that I should be studying? Who should I be meeting and talking to? How can I help? Every answer led to ideas, contacts, action. One response was perhaps the greatest influence on my practice. Following the 1994 reauthorization of the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the primary responsibility for the humane care and handling of these animals was shifted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (“USDA”) under the Animal Welfare Act (“AWA”). When one leader was asked as to how I might help, she replied, “We need someone who knows more about the Animal Welfare Act.” For the last 30 plus years, I have tried to learn a little bit more about the AWA every day.



## **6. Coming together can be better (and allows for greater resources to benefit animals themselves).**

In the mid-1990s, the USDA convened a Marine Mammal Negotiated Rulemaking (“Neg. Reg.”) under the Federal Advisory Committee Act and the Negotiated Rulemaking Act.<sup>1</sup> This brought together diverse stakeholders from academia, government, the marine mammal community and animal protection organizations to develop new or enhanced Animal Welfare Act regulations by consensus. About half the regulations were agreed to be updated before the funding ran out. Five years later, that “consensus language” was published as new regulations. A quarter century later, there have been no further revisions, especially to the regulations that went unaddressed, though many are warranted. A number of the changes which resulted from the Neg. Reg., such as transport plans, documentation of appropriate staff training, and enrichment should also be extended to regulations covering other species under the AWA.

## **7. Look beyond positions, identify underlying and potentially shared interests.**

This is another lesson from the Neg. Reg.: Earnestly listening to different “sides,” learning the reasons and history underlying practices and rules puts us in a much better place to make sound decisions benefitting animals. Hearing others out also illuminates potential common ground based on an accurate understanding of the real interests underlying stated and sometimes hardened positions.

## **8. Keep building your knowledge and others will discover your “expertise.”**

The Marine Mammal Neg. Reg. and another subject—release, return and reintroduction (they are each distinct) of marine mammals to the wild—were developments of great interest. Voluntarily taking the initiative prompted extensive proprietary analysis and a voluminous report whose invaluable references continue to be resources decades later.

## **9. Don’t just fix problems, make things better for the animals.**

Under the AWA, USDA had an informal, sort of dispute mechanism process for regulated entities to resolve differences relating to the contents of AWA inspection reports. After a number of years, the agency had some guidance on the process, and inspection report appeals are now included in the AWA regulations.<sup>2</sup> Often times it seemed that this generally helpful process could devolve into “we’re right, you’re wrong.” While there are valid differences which can be addressed through



added context, external references, and regulatory history, that just gets one to an assessment of what happened and what, if anything should be corrected. Necessary, yes, but less than fulfilling. Instead, using the process for critical self-examination, professional growth and continuous improvement to voluntarily include wide-ranging improvement plans can make things meaningfully better for the animals, whatever the outcome of an appeal. This keeps things moving forward.

### **10. Listen to everyone, talk to anyone, but listen first for deeper understanding.**

Severe hearing loss requires dependence on hearing aids. With improved hearing, listening skills make a big difference. Countless times, comments, feedback, reactions and other things communicated to us are our greatest teachers. They may help us discover gaps, vulnerabilities and areas for improvement, but only if we listen until others feel heard and then think and act constructively.

### **11. One thought can shift the paradigm.**

Years of handling back-end challenges, being brought in after something bad happened, yielded many lessons. It seemed much more satisfactory and beneficial to proactively apply these lessons to prevent or mitigate potential problems, crises and tragedies. This led to the little book, *Excellence Beyond Compliance: Enhancing Animal Welfare through the Constructive Use of the Animal Welfare Act*.<sup>3</sup> The book and the decade of writing the “Getting Better All the Time” columns, published in the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance Academy newsletter, on continuous improvement and advancing animal interests, protection and well-being, shift consideration of the AWA from the end point of what is legally required to the starting point of what should be done to do the right thing for the animals. Additionally, incremental change in the right direction compounded over time can make a great difference.

### **12. Transforming adversity into improvement.**

Managing through or responding to crises and tragedies is sad and difficult. It’s vitally important for all concerned, especially the animals, to get things right. That takes a lot. For many, accurately figuring things out and providing accountability is sufficient. However, having gained unique insight into a situation, the organization, people and animals, more should be done. Comprehensive and extensive recommendations for improvements going forward have been a hallmark of independent reviews—some of which have been fully transparent, many of which have not. When transparent, though it may be difficult at first, all benefit; it turns the lessons from one situation into tools for growth for entire communities of professionals, thus helping a greater number of animals.



### **13. Unknown, seemingly invisible acts can be precedent setting changes.**

Many things one does as an attorney, especially those within the attorney-client privilege, may never be known to anyone other than a client. When thoughtfully undertaken and executed, these things may lead to a new direction or establishing innovative, good practices elevating considerations of animals' interests, protection and well-being. That could come in the form of contractual provisions in a small part of a large transaction or within a new informal practice or policy. Change happens in as many ways as we can create it.

### **14. Ethics matters, application of ethical considerations in realistic ways is game-changing.**

From the largest and most difficult to what may appear the smallest situations, thoughtful examination of multiple levels of ethical considerations is essential. Model Rule 2.1, Attorney as Advisor, is a good and useful guide. It provides:

In representing a client, a lawyer shall exercise independent professional judgement and render candid advice. In rendering advice, a lawyer may refer not only to law but to other considerations such as moral, economic, social, and political factors, that may be relevant to the client's situation.<sup>4</sup>

### **15. Mentoring and being mentored is a great way to build a relationship, be supported and accelerate growth, and it goes both ways.**

Mentors and mentees have taught me so much that the great good in my life would be unimaginable without their help. The first rule of good mentoring and perhaps leadership as well should be letting others know that you have their back. They are not alone.

### **16. Leadership is service.**

Serving others, including animals, and serving a cause is what good leaders do. Intentionally rendering this service in furtherance of a mission greater than any one of us brings us together, makes us better and improves things.



**17. The ABA TIPS Animal Law Committee is a great place to connect, gain experience and knowledge, help and grow.**

Bar association involvement and leadership throughout my career have provided countless opportunities to build a practice, career and cultivate friendships, and fashion a life well spent. I'm grateful for every moment, even the difficult ones. >>

*“Keep growing quietly and seriously throughout your whole development.” – Rainer Maria Rilke*

*“Happiness and personal fulfillment are the natural consequences of doing the right thing.” – Epictetus*

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**Endnotes**

1 5 U.S.C. §§ 1001-1013; 5 U.S.C. §§ 561-570a.

2 9 C.F.R. § 2.13.

3 JAMES F. GESUALDI, EXCELLENCE BEYOND COMPLIANCE: ENHANCING ANIMAL WELFARE THROUGH THE CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF THE ANIMAL WELFARE ACT (2014).

4 *Model Rules of Prof'l Conduct R. 2.1*; See *Advising on Animal-Related Matters in Light of Ethical (And Other) Considerations*, ANIMAL L. COMMITTEE NEWSL. (Am. Bar Ass'n Tort Trial and Ins. Practice Section, Chicago, IL), Winter/Spring 2022, at 16.





*Anatomy... Continued from page 20*

On paper, the road to passage of a resolution might seem straightforward; in practice, it is a demanding, detail-oriented marathon that requires consensus-building at every turn. For Resolution 504, collaboration across the Committee and throughout the broader ABA was the engine that drove the Subcommittee's work forward and the ultimate hallmark of our success.

*Pro-Tip: Familiarize yourself with written ABA resolution guidance documents but then reach out to veterans of the process. Written rules are important, but there is no substitute for lived experience.*

## The Exploration Phase

In August 2023, the Subcommittee hosted a "Lunch and Learn" on disputes regarding companion animals in domestic relations cases. This sparked Subcommittee discussions about pursuing a resolution. That fall, Subcommittee Student Chair Mei Brunson (Lewis & Clark Law School) began researching and preparing a research memo for the Subcommittee that was essential in providing an overview of legal issues and helped us to identify the key legal levers for a potential resolution. The memo was shared with the Subcommittee in January 2024, and following Subcommittee discussion at our monthly meetings, we decided to move forward.

Given the Committee's impressive resolution history, we sought advice from those who had previously successfully navigated the process before the House of Delegates. Molly Armus and Alex Cerussi provided an understanding of the timeline and process and ensured that our efforts aligned with existing Committee initiatives and any resolutions in the pipeline. Jim Gesualdi and Daina Bray were, as always, generous with their time and sage advice. All four expressed positivity about the prospect for success. In fact, Daina encouraged us to go beyond family law to include adjacent companion animal legal issues of importance. We brainstormed how to pull together a cohesive resolution grounded in the role of companion animals as family members.

In the spring of 2024, the Subcommittee decided to move forward with the preparation of a three-pronged resolution focusing on companion animals in: (1) family law; (2) civil protection orders; and (3) emergency, temporary, and transitional housing. The common thread through all three prongs was the intersection of domestic violence and animal cruelty, and the urgent need to protect survivors and their companion animals. We set our sights on submitting a resolution for the February 2025 Mid-Year Meeting. While that timeline initially felt generous, the mirage of a "long runway" disappeared quickly once the drafting process began.



*Pro-Tip: Identifying an issue that is likely to resonate with the broader ABA is crucial, as is working within the Committee to ensure that efforts are cohesive and appropriately staged in consideration of other resolutions in the making.*

## The Drafting Phase

ABA policy is established solely by the resolution itself. Yet it is the accompanying report, which can be up to 15 pages in length, that serves as the critical foundation for generating support for the resolution. At the outset, two resources proved indispensable: the ABA's Drafting Guide and Style Manual for House of Delegates Resolutions<sup>5</sup> and the Resolutions with Reports Formatting Checklist.<sup>6</sup> We consulted these early and often.

We prepared a rough draft resolution for consideration at the Subcommittee's June 2024 meeting and began discussion about the next step: preparing the report. We invited Subcommittee members to join the drafting effort and were fortunate to have Angela Tyczkowski and Holly Spainhower step forward. Their exhaustive research and meticulous attention to detail over the ensuing months were vital to the process. We divided the report into sections. Over the summer, we wrote, re-wrote, reorganized, and refined our writing, constantly evaluating how to craft a resolution and report that would resonate with the broader ABA. We then had the challenge of trying to fold our respective sections into one cohesive report that carried a single voice. This was an iterative, time-consuming, and collaborative process.

We presented the draft report to the Subcommittee at the August 2024 meeting and invited input. The insights from our Subcommittee colleagues, like Madeline Bernstein (who had experience navigating these complex issues in her role as President of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Los Angeles) sharpened the draft. We incorporated Subcommittee feedback and labored over our draft to further refine it before we were slated to present the resolution and report to the full Animal Law Committee in September 2024.

*Pro-Tip: The drafting process is more time-consuming than one may envision. A successful resolution and report involves multiple authors and contributors and a collaborative process. Plan for ample time for a methodical approach to this phase.*

## The Generating Support Phase

Simultaneously with drafting, we began identifying ABA entities likely to share an interest in the resolution. We recognized the Family Law Section as an important stakeholder early on. We reached out to the Section during the initial stages and extended an invitation to collaborate on the drafting process. While the Section



declined the invitation to co-draft, it provided essential support for our pursuit of the resolution and shared feedback about our ideas.

We also researched other ABA entities that might be interested in supporting the effort. Identifying these entities is not only essential for building consensus but also a requirement of the resolution process. Here, we identified: the Commission on Domestic & Sexual Violence; the Center on Children and the Law; the Commission on Law and Aging; the Government and Public Sector Lawyers Division; the Section of State, Local, and Tribal Government Law; the Senior Lawyers Division; the Solo, Small Firm and General Practice Division; the Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service; and the Young Lawyers Division. We later initiated outreach to state delegates and offered to discuss the resolution to their respective delegations at the Mid-Year Meeting.

*Pro-Tip: The ABA's vast network of sections, committees, and commissions offers surprising opportunities for relationship-building. Start this outreach early. Look for common ground and remember: animal law intersects with almost every practice area.*

## The Passage Phase

Throughout the passage phase, Resolutions Vice Chair, Alex Cerussi, provided essential guidance on timelines and ABA process. The formal journey toward the resolution's passage began with the Animal Law Committee, which approved the resolution and report on September 12, 2024. From Committee colleagues we also received helpful feedback, fresh ideas, and contributions that helped us weave together a more precise and impactful piece of work. While the sequence of approvals can vary, we felt it was essential to secure the Family Law Section's co-sponsorship next before proceeding further. We were delighted when the Section voted to co-sponsor on September 27, 2024.

We prepared for submission to the TIPS Council and felt we'd run out of time to seek more co-sponsors before the submission deadline. At this stage (and beyond), Jim Gesualdi and Daina Bray provided the kind of institutional wisdom that isn't written in any manual but is essential for success. We were slated to present the resolution and report to TIPS Council in mid-October and we set about to determine the best presentation. We decided that Jim should be our spokesperson, and his testimony before TIPS Council hit all the right notes. Jim and Daina's deep network of ABA connections proved invaluable. We were grateful when Marvin Dang, House of Delegates Secretary, spoke positively about the resolution and provided guidance. On October 17, 2024, the TIPS Council voted unanimously to approve the resolution.



We were eager to connect with the Commission on Domestic & Sexual Violence (CDSV). Before doing so, we investigated whether an ABA commission (as opposed to a section or committee) could take an official position on a proposed resolution (we'll save you the research, they can!). We shared our draft resolution and report and were thrilled when CDSV voted to co-sponsor on October 31, 2024. This was also the beginning of new relationships and a powerful and collegial alliance that continues to this day, as we now regularly work closely with CDSV on our common cause of preventing domestic violence and animal cruelty.

This did not mean that the work was over, however. Resolutions and reports must go before an ABA Committee on Drafting Policies and Procedures. This step in the process involved further refinement of the draft and was fast-paced, as we were nearing the deadline to submit the final version to the House of Delegates. TIPS Chair, Christopher Nolan, guided us through this process masterfully. We also obtained approval from the House of Delegates Rules and Calendar Committee, the final step on the path to getting a resolution before the House of Delegates.

At last, we met the mid-December deadline for inclusion in the agenda for the Mid-Year Meeting, and we began to consider the formal presentation to the House of Delegates. While the Committee and TIPS were the genesis of Resolution 504 and led the resolution effort, we felt that having someone from the CDSV lead the testimony would be the most compelling strategy for delegates who may not understand the connection between domestic violence and animals.

The CDSV's Chair, Maleaha Brown, agreed to provide the lead testimony before the House,<sup>7</sup> and she did a marvelous job. The Subcommittee (through Megan Senatori) presented next, sharing the importance of the issue and how the resolution provided an opportunity to protect both people and pets. The collaborative effort grew even stronger when Katherine Larkin-Wong, the Goal III Woman Member-at-Large of the Board of Governors, offered to testify. Her moving testimony unexpectedly revealed that she was a survivor of abuse, and this revelation underscored the real-world impact that the resolution would make.

On February 3, 2025, the House of Delegates overwhelmingly adopted Resolution 504. We were all overjoyed with the outcome. Our priority quickly shifted to raising awareness for domestic violence survivors and their companion animals. We are grateful to Amanda Robert at the *ABA Journal* for her inspiring article, released on the day of passage.<sup>8</sup> The Policy & Alliances Subcommittee also sprang into action, sharing the news of Resolution 504 with state and local bar associations.



*ProTip: The connections and relationships that the Committee and its members have built over decades are indispensable to its success. This includes the credibility that the Committee has carefully cultivated as it has championed animal law within the ABA and represented the field so professionally and passionately for over 20 years.*

## The Implementation Phase

We originally envisioned our work largely concluding with the resolution's adoption—imagining we would pass the baton to the ABA for implementation. We discovered, however, that there is no self-effectuating process for resolution implementation. We quickly pivoted toward converting policy into impact. Throughout this phase, members of the TIPS staff, including Jason Billups, Jeanne Emily DuBose, and Theresa Livingston, were essential. They were pleasant, helpful, and knowledgeable about all of the administrative support we needed to help move the work forward.

In March 2025, we re-convened the key players who had worked together to develop and pass the Resolution to generate ideas for how we could implement it. What began as informal ad hoc conversations eventually grew into a “Resolution 504 Working Group” that included: our friends at the CDSV (Chief Counsel, Maricarmen Garza; Staff Attorney, Maggie Roberts; and CDSV Chair, Maleaha Brown), the Policy & Alliances Subcommittee (Co-Chair Rebecca Critser), Jim Gesualdi, and Daina Bray. Our conversations quickly revealed shared aspirations to level up and make a difference for survivors and their animals by broadly raising more awareness.

The Resolution 504 Working Group began to meet at least monthly, sometimes more frequently, to identify opportunities for outreach, raising awareness, further collaboration, and implementation of Resolution 504. Our inboxes quickly filled with our daily idea exchanges. These sustained efforts have resulted in a variety of initiatives, including:

- **Uniform Law Commission (ULC):** At the Midyear Meeting, we had learned that the Uniform Law Commission (ULC) was coincidentally in the process of convening a Study Committee on Ownership and Possession of Pets at Family Dissolution and Related Issues. We reached out to the ULC to get information and offered to be involved. Subsequently, TIPS appointed us as ABA Advisors. We, in turn, invited others to be involved as observers. The ULC Study Committee's work culminated in a final report, issued in December 2025, recommending the convening of a Drafting Committee. We are thrilled that the Study Committee utilized Resolution 504 throughout its report, and this month the ULC approved the creation of a Drafting Committee on “Ownership or Possession of Pets at Family Dissolution and Domestic Violence Proceedings.”



- **AVMA Collaboration:** In late spring 2025, the 504 Working Group came up with the idea to reach out to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). CDSV initiated this outreach and we collectively began to meet regularly with the AVMA. Our work culminated in a webinar series<sup>9</sup> (Part I<sup>10</sup> and Part II<sup>11</sup>) for veterinarians, social workers, lawyers, and other aligned stakeholders, released in honor of National Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October. Through this process we learned about the formal ABA co-sponsorship process and worked with the ABA's Office of General Counsel. The AVMA also helped to share Resolution 504 through the AVMA Journal and member outreach.<sup>12</sup> The ABA (Betsy Adeboyejo) helped to raise awareness through a press release.<sup>13</sup>
- **Policy Work:** The Policy & Alliances Subcommittee (led by co-chairs Rebecca Critser and Holly Spainhower) investigated how to move policy-making forward, furthering relationships with ABA's Governmental Affairs Office, including David Eppstein and Christina Ennis. This led to an invitation to feature Resolution 504 in an article for the ABA's Washington Letter, a publication of the ABA Government Affairs Office that helped raise even more awareness.<sup>14</sup> We invited David and Christina to join us at the 504 Working Group meetings and we've begun exchanging ideas for further impact. Furthermore, Committee member Fiona Farrel led outreach to the New York State Bar Association Committee on Animals and the Law. As a result, the NYSBA incorporated Resolution 504 into its legislative memoranda and lobbying, and hosted a CLE webinar.
- **Cross-Disciplinary Outreach:** The webinar with the AVMA opened doors to the National Association of Social Workers and the International Association of Veterinary Social Work. Each organization had members in attendance at the webinar and reached out to us afterwards. We are currently exploring joint initiatives with both organizations.
- **Intra-Committee Collaboration:** We are currently developing two potential webinars. One, spearheaded by Committee member Bonnie Lutz, will address confidentiality of veterinary records in the context of domestic violence. The second is a collaboration with the Equine Subcommittee, focusing on the unique challenges faced by domestic violence survivors with horses, as well as raising awareness on this issue to new audiences.

*Pro-Tip: Adoption of a resolution is only one step in the process. Successful implementation requires an organized, multi-disciplinary working group to ensure the policy reaches the practitioners and organizations that can use it.*



## Conclusion

The journey of Resolution 504 illustrates that while the ABA policy-making process is rigorous, it is also a powerful engine for meaningful change. Each innovation and opportunity builds upon itself. Each step along the way, we found more synergies, more ways to expand the reach of this Committee's work, and, most importantly, more opportunities to make a real-world impact outside of the ABA to improve the lives of animals. A successful resolution is the product of a diverse coalition of caring professionals moving in the same direction. The journey of Resolution 504 is far from over, as it is a living policy that will continue to make an impact for years to come. To all who joined this effort, thank you, and know that it was because of each of you that we are making a difference for people and animals impacted by domestic violence. ➤

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*Supporting... Continued from page 21*

## **Real Challenges and Tangible Solutions**

Before diving into contributors' insights, I would like to offer some personal insights. From my experience, AAOs' approaches toward initiating respectful outreach with communities must be unique to each community. I strongly recommend AAOs understand partnering communities' cultures; historical and current<sup>5</sup> dynamics with the U.S. federal government and neighboring jurisdictions (whether U.S. states, territories, or Indigenous Nations); and historical and current influences or impositions the communities experienced from mainstream culture(s). Furthermore, AAOs may make mistakes as they build a new relationship with a community. To that point, I know some of my approaches in collaborating with contributors' communities have been faulty, usually because of my ignorance (which I immediately worked to correct). But contributors have also graciously showed me that making mistakes can be okay and can be repairable, as long as engagements with their communities are navigated with humility, and anti-racist,<sup>6</sup> anti-colonialist,<sup>7</sup> and decolonialist<sup>8</sup> practices. I also suggest AAOs should maintain an inherent desire to learn from partnering communities' residents. And, AAOs should ensure all aspects of their engagements with communities are inclusive and deferential. In turn, AAOs may partner with communities, to co-create beneficial changes for their human and animal residents. One contributor summarized these dynamics by explaining:

To genuinely support communities in [this jurisdiction] and other historically marginalized regions,<sup>9</sup> lawyers and advocacy organizations in the United States need to move beyond welfare and adopt models of solidarity, horizontal, and transformative collaboration, not vertical intervention. This implies acknowledging structural inequalities, historical power relations and systematic institutional failures.<sup>10</sup>

The following paragraphs offer recommendations for developing partnerships that align with such a vision.

## **Implementing Anti-racist, Anti-colonialist, and Decolonialist Practices**

*Strengthening communities' existing infrastructure.* AAOs must respect and support the strengthening of existing local leadership within the community to which they would like to offer their support.<sup>11</sup> Throughout their outreach toward such communities—whether during initial consultation processes, co-hosting community assemblies, or co-facilitating community dialogues—AAOs must maintain respectful contact with an approached community's local leadership and residents.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, when AAOs are invited to consult on methods for strengthening a community's social infrastructure, AAOs must prioritize work with the partnering community



that supports the community's continued development of its local leadership.<sup>13</sup> This approach also applies to strengthening the partnering community's existing institutions: Its local government and respective agencies, and its subject-matter professionals,<sup>14</sup> including attorneys, law enforcement officers, judges, veterinarians, and social service providers. Indeed, "communities already have committed defenders, organizations[,] and officials. The greatest impact occurs when legal [and other forms of] support focus[] on enhancing that leadership, not replacing it."<sup>15</sup>

Communities need AAOs to provide sustained, non-episodic solidarity.<sup>16</sup> In other words, AAOs cannot offer support to communities strictly during media crises,<sup>17</sup> or through ulterior motives to promote their reputations. Rather, AAOs need to invest in consistent, long-term collaboration,<sup>18</sup> for the genuine desire to support the solicited community's human and animal residents. Partnering communities recognize AAOs' support to be genuine when it is continuous, not reactive.<sup>19</sup>

*Navigating governments.* Some communities need governments (and their respective agencies) that exist outside of the communities' local jurisdictions (external governments), to stop employing potentially discriminatory conduct when enacting and enforcing policies.<sup>20</sup> Discriminatory practices toward a local jurisdiction can develop from multiple factors, including, but not limited to, the local jurisdiction's predominant language, predominant demographics, geographic location, or its political dynamics with the external government.<sup>21</sup> One contributor exemplified their concern about the use of potentially discriminatory practices through a letter submitted to an external government agency regarding its proposed plan to remove resident cat colonies<sup>22</sup>:

In 2022, [the agency] released a draft Management Plan to the public, soliciting written comments and holding two public meetings on November 2 and 3, 2022. In 2023, after these meetings, [the agency] published an amended draft of the Management Plan and scheduled a public meeting for August 23, 2023, from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm, at —.

The description and purpose of the August 23, 2023, public meeting, as published by [the agency], were as follows:

"Please join us for an in-person meeting to learn about the free-ranging cat management plan and environmental assessment. The meeting will provide a brief overview of the draft plan, then transition into an opportunity to speak, as well as provide written comments."

At the public meeting on August 23, 2023, attendees objected to the fact that the draft Management Plan was only available in English, affecting the knowledge, participation, and rights of Spanish-speaking individuals.



In response, [the agency] agreed to publish the Management Plan in Spanish, extending the deadline for written comments until today, October 5, 2023.

However, [the agency] did not convene a new public meeting to give Spanish-speaking individuals the opportunity to explain the draft plan to them and provide them with an opportunity to express themselves orally.

Furthermore, holding a public meeting to explain the plan, which had already been published in Spanish, would have allowed Spanish-speaking individuals to submit informed written comments (a process that ends today, according to [the agency]).

Given these circumstances, there is unequal treatment towards Spanish-speaking individuals, which is why we are copying this communication to the United States and [the local jurisdiction's] Civil Rights Commissions, as we believe this is a discriminatory act, a violation of equal protection under the law, and a violation of civil rights.

It is pertinent to establish that, as stated on the [agency]'s own website, SUPERINTENDENT . . . expressed the following, confirming the importance of providing the opportunity mentioned above:

“Public comment and involvement are not merely a step or a checkmark in the process. It can influence how decisions are made, and the [agency] takes this process very seriously. We are conscious of the complexity of the issue that the proposed actions seek to address and hope that through this process we come up with a strategy to manage it successfully.”<sup>23</sup>

Communities need support in navigating discriminatory practices, and removing the practices' bureaucratic barriers, like those described in the letter quoted above. Otherwise, such frameworks can negatively impact communities' human and animal residents and significantly undermine their legal protections. As one systemic example of this “political design,”<sup>24</sup> U.S. territories-based communities have experienced such impacts through the U.S. federal government's use of eligibility criteria, to determine the legal rights it affords to territories' residents.<sup>25</sup> Until those eligibility criteria change, these territories will remain unincorporated,<sup>26</sup> which undermines the impact of their residents' participation in nationwide matters and prevents their political input from being equal to the input of their state counterparts.<sup>27</sup> These dynamics necessitate AAOs' development of systems that actually effectuate the support they solicit to communities in local U.S. jurisdictions, such as the territories, and to sovereign jurisdictions the United States neighbors,



including federally recognized and unrecognized Indigenous Nations. If AAOs do not fully understand the negative impacts that external governments' disparate treatment has on local jurisdictions, then AAOs may not have the foresight to design their resources in ways that actually help local jurisdictions overcome the barriers that result from that disparate treatment. Therefore, when AAOs offer their resources to communities that face these circumstances, they need to question their existing resource infrastructures,<sup>28</sup> and as necessary, customize those infrastructures so that communities can successfully access those resources.

An external government's bureaucratic barriers can prevent communities from effectively protecting their human and animal residents because of its lack of intervention. Territory-based communities may experience this dynamic when the U.S. federal government requires a territory to comply with federal laws, but then the territory does not receive federal support when the local government attempts to enforce those federal laws. One contributor illustrated this dynamic by way of their local government's attempts to investigate animal fighting ventures within its jurisdiction<sup>29</sup>:

Specifically, I am thinking of cockfighting. For example, I have gamebird import information, so if I had someone interested in prosecuting cockfighters, I have both the shipper and recipient information. Granted, poultry imports are currently at a standstill because of avian influenza, but prior to that, this was something I wished I had more support on.<sup>30</sup>

By learning about recurring issues like those in the previous quote, AAOs could use their resources to help local advocates navigate these types of challenges, despite absences of external government support.

*Barriers to funding applications.* Some of the bureaucratic barriers discussed in the previous section impact communities' abilities to submit applications to federal and AAO grant solicitations. Furthermore, territories' local governments are not always considered prospective candidates for these types of funding opportunities<sup>31</sup>:

[Oftentimes] we fall into that grey area as "not a US state" so [we] do not qualify for US based funding but [we are] not "international" enough to qualify for international nonprofit funding. Additionally (not sure if it is relevant but throwing it out there just in case), [territory-based communities need] assistance with grant writing.<sup>32</sup>

Additionally, some contributors explained territories' governments and local advocacy organizations cannot meet many of the eligibility requirements some AAOs require, to receive funding.<sup>33</sup> Per one community's example, some grant fundings' eligibility



requirements include “high live release rate[s], [and] low euthanasia rate[s]” for animals the community’s animal control team brings to shelters.<sup>34</sup> This community shares that same goal with the funder. But, without the grant funding, the community cannot change its existing live release rates and euthanasia rates, which in turn, perpetuates its ineligibility.<sup>35</sup> Many Indigenous Nations encounter similar barriers to apply for grants and to receive funding.<sup>36</sup> I encourage AAOs that would like to offer grant opportunities, to design their grant applications so communities that have found themselves ineligible because of similar dynamics, can have equitable opportunities to access much needed financial resources.<sup>37</sup>

Some contributors offered recommendations to AAOs that could increase their communities’ access to grants. Continuing the release rate/euthanasia rate example: “If funders were more open to helping us improve our live release rates, it would open up a lot more opportunities for us.”<sup>38</sup> Contributors also asked that AAOs offer technical support to grant candidates who are completing funding applications. Through such support, local organizations can apply for grants with greater ease, meet administrative requirements, and compete with other applicants (who may have more resources), on equal terms.<sup>39</sup> Changing grant eligibility requirements and developing internal infrastructures that help communities compete, could utilize AAOs’ resources for these deserving communities, in ways that may not have been seen before.

*Barriers to receive funding.* When communities do successfully submit grant applications, some infrastructural barriers exist that prevent recipient communities from accessing the funding or from using it in ways that accurately respond to their needs.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, a nuanced issue that may arise is the misalignment between AAO or federal funding with recipients’ needs. If funders do not communicate with the communities they would like to support, they will not have the necessary understanding to design their grant solicitations for communities with which they would like to partner. For instance, one contributor explained:

[i]n order for cases of animal abuse to be sustained in court, it is essential that the Police have access to economic resources that allow forensic veterinary evaluations, necropsies[,] and specialized expert reports. Without this support, justice for animals is limited by budgetary constraints [that are] unrelated to the merits of the case.<sup>41</sup>

Another contributor similarly described their community’s need for financial support, to access veterinary care for victim animals; to collaborate with veterinary experts; to conduct comprehensive investigations; and to examine evidence.<sup>42</sup> My team is only aware of these specific needs because of consistent, direct communication



with advocates who are members of communities that frequently encounter these types of funding barriers.

As funders, AAOs can work with communities to dissolve these barriers. Perhaps AAOs could ask communities' members what they need, before publishing grant solicitations. Further, perhaps AAOs could partner with communities, with whom they have developed trusting relationships, to design grants around those communities' expressed needs. For general grant solicitations, perhaps AAOs could ask communities for their feedback regarding methods that will make their funding more accessible. AAOs would need to reserve adequate preparation time to pursue these inquiries, with the understanding that these insights would still be limited because every community encounters unique challenges. But, this type of deferential approach could inform AAOs, so they provide grants that focus on generalized accessibility and promote recipient communities' self-determination. These strategies may also develop dynamics between AAOs and recipient communities that equalize historically imbalanced power relationships.<sup>43</sup>

### **Equal and Equitable Relationships and Collaborations**

Contributors offered some general recommendations regarding the methods AAOs could use to develop successful relationships with their communities. For instance, AAOs should treat communities and their local governments as equal partners<sup>44</sup>— “[t]hese communities should not be seen as exceptions within the system, but as allies with experience, practical knowledge, and solutions of their own who deserve respect and equitable access to resources.”<sup>45</sup> Additionally, AAOs’ should pursue partnerships with communities that promote interagency collaborations.<sup>46</sup> These efforts also need to be interdisciplinary, and need to promote discussions between public health, education, and social service sectors.<sup>47</sup> As one contributor explained, “[s]ustainable change requires ongoing partnerships between lawyers, police, prosecutors, veterinarians, municipalities, and community based-organizations, along with ongoing education and training.”<sup>48</sup> To support viable change, AAOs should engage in “real community listening”<sup>49</sup> that will enable them to respond appropriately to communities’ insights about their lived experiences.

*Lack of existing relationships.*<sup>50</sup> Through my AAO, I have witnessed ways that a community’s lack of existing relationships with entities in adjacent jurisdictions can detrimentally impact entities in and around the community’s jurisdiction. One contributor’s anecdote illustrates this point. Their community’s necessitated reliance on agency resources that a neighboring state operates has exacerbated tensions surrounding dog welfare in their jurisdiction:



[U]nlike nearby cities[,] we don't have contracts with [the neighboring jurisdiction's] Animal Control or similar agencies so when there's an emergency like a dangerous dog, there's no one to call. One of the barriers to building this relationship is money, another is a cultural insensitivity whether real or perceived. For example, [our community] members can have different views on "owning" animals (as opposed to caring for animals that are nearby but aren't necessarily "mine") and licensing/tagging animals. One of the things I heard (thirdhand) about a previous time we tried to engage with [the neighboring jurisdiction's] Animal Control was that, in addition to offering services, they also wanted the ability to enforce requirements like vaccination and licenses/tags.<sup>51</sup>

*Co-creation of solutions.* AAOs should listen to communities before they design or propose solutions.<sup>52</sup> This suggestion exists because some AAOs do not effectively engage with partnering communities when they design projects using mainstream-society perspectives, for those communities.<sup>53</sup> I have also learned that AAOs miss opportunities to successfully co-develop solutions when their projects do not include (at least) a co-manager who belongs to the partnering community. Therefore, instead of AAOs "bring[ing] solutions," AAOs and partnering communities should build them together, with deference to the partnering community's leadership and decision-making.<sup>54</sup> Throughout this process, AAOs should also welcome community members' participation and feedback.<sup>55</sup> Lastly, AAOs must respect the partnering community members' institutional and cultural knowledge,<sup>56</sup> as well as members' inherent understanding of their jurisdiction's socio-economic dynamics and methods of navigating experienced barriers to success. Suggestions like these are "collaborative and respectful approach[es, which have] been instrumental in strengthening community work in . . . historically underserved regions."<sup>57</sup> Such approaches are the key to successful work between communities and AAOs.

### **Providing, or Increasing, Direct Access to Resources.**

*Transferring resource authority.* AAOs should support transfers of power, decision-making authority, and resources that they would use to protect animals, to the communities in which those animals live.<sup>58</sup> These changes in advocacy would create space for communities' autonomy, agency, and self-determination.<sup>59</sup> By keeping services and resources local,<sup>60</sup> such changes would increase the speed at which communities can protect their animal residents. For example, one contributor explained their community would prefer to have its animal services and animal shelter located within its jurisdiction and operated by its government.<sup>61</sup> But, because the community's resident human population is less than 5,000, it "[doesn't] have the size to justify" that type of infrastructure.<sup>62</sup> The contributor expressed their desire for the community to partner with a nonprofit organization that could collaboratively



offer animal control and shelter resources as an alternative solution.<sup>63</sup> However, that relationship would need to ensure the contracting nonprofit organization followed the community's directives and provided services that genuinely respond to the community's needs.

*Legal support.* "The most effective legal work begins by listening to local communities and understanding their legal, cultural, and structural realities before proposing strategies and interventions."<sup>64</sup>

Contributors consistently expressed the need for support with legal advocacy in niche fields, such as animal law. Some examples of support that advocates have requested, or consented to receiving from my team, include access to legal information; statutory interpretation and editing; support for new and ongoing case investigations; training in specialized practices for animal cruelty investigations (and complementing forensic veterinary medicine);<sup>65</sup> and most importantly, helping connect local stakeholders within their respective communities. Contributors have also requested support in gaining knowledge of, and access to, interest-specific regional and nationwide legal networks; pursuing novel advocacy strategies; pursuing impact litigation; and evaluating existing regulatory processes.<sup>66</sup> Focusing on individual advocates, contributors expressed needing support from AAOs toward local advocates' animal protection efforts, which may include training advocates on local laws; helping them navigate their jurisdiction's legal system(s); or defending their legal rights during civic engagements.<sup>67</sup> One contributor also expressed needing support with the creation of rights observatories, which are entities that focus on promoting protections for certain groups.<sup>68</sup>

The contributors' communities have brilliant attorneys who dedicate their lives to protecting their human and animal neighbors. Therefore, from my experience, AAOs are allies when they are available as back-up resources to communities' local attorneys. This positioning allows AAOs to offer their niche resources and expertise, which would be difficult for most attorneys to obtain, without displacing communities' legal experts. In short, communities need AAOs to respect their established legal infrastructure,<sup>69</sup> and to provide legal support when communities' advocates identify a dearth of relevant resources.

*Day-to-day logistics.* The last area that contributors explained impedes their animal advocacy efforts is the absence of resources that help them execute their daily work. One contributor explained that their community's members lack stable transportation, which prevents them from fulfilling the community's goals to protect animals within its jurisdiction:



If I had to guess, the nearest veterinarians['] offices are probably a 15-minute drive away but that's not so easy if you would need to take a sick animal by bus or take them to get vaccinations or routine care. (I can't imagine bringing a sleepy 50 lb. dog home on the bus after a spay or neuter.) Again, if we were putting our wishes on paper, I think something like a mobile vet clinic that came out periodically would be really great. We have a dental care van, why not?<sup>70</sup>

Impediments to executing animal advocacy work may also come from a community's lack of access to subject-matter experts,<sup>71</sup> who, generally, can be difficult to find. This need frequently arises within my team's focus areas, especially for consultation on case investigations with forensic veterinarians. One contributor illustrates this point:

For criminal cases, some barrier[s] we've encountered are: lack of experts (our deputies are great, and get a lot of training, but they're not animal welfare experts), lack of resources to hold animals either as evidence, or to keep a defendant from owning animals while a case is pending, lack of emergency response (I can think of a case a couple of years ago where there was a dangerous dog, and we were just told there was "nothing we could do")<sup>72</sup>

These anecdotes seem to encapsulate the barriers to effective advocacy that contributors identify throughout this article. These types of challenges frequently inhibit communities' success in advocating for animals and protecting them from harm. Furthermore, gaps in communities' animal and human advocacy efforts do not exist because of "local incapacity,"<sup>73</sup> but because of disparate treatment toward historically and currently underserved and ignored communities. AAOs have the opportunity to rectify (at least some) of these dynamics by establishing networks that make available basic, but crucial, resources to communities, so those communities can protect all animal and human residents in the same way communities within mainstream societies are able to. AAOs can increase their efficacy by learning about advocacy challenges from communities' perspectives and recognizing communities' members as the resident experts they are. Then, AAOs can successfully use their resources to resolve those challenges by way of partnering communities' instruction.

## **Conclusion: Moving Forward with Collaborative Advocacy**

The advocates and organizations who exist in communities the article's contributors represent, or who live in communities like the ones contributors represent, are the leaders of animal protections within their jurisdictions. They work tirelessly every day, to establish lasting changes that benefit all animals and humans who live within their spheres of influence. They are *the* experts who know which solutions will resolve the



challenges their respective communities encounter. As a result, they provide models for innovation and resilience to AAOs that may not face similar forms of adversity. As one contributor states, “we share these observations to continue broadening and deepening that impact[.]”<sup>74</sup>

As allies, we—myself, this article’s readers, and AAOs—have the privilege and responsibility to offer our resources and to respectfully engage with communities’ members as they choose. Through these deferential collaborations, we will properly support communities’ determined forms of empowerment and upliftment. In turn, I urge AAOs to focus on “opening . . . space and . . . listen[] to the communities”<sup>75</sup> whose lived experiences may be different than our own, so that we can become better at supporting the creation of a genuinely equitable and equal world for everyone. ➤

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## Endnotes

- 1 The U.S. territories that are home to human residents include American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. *Federal Statistical Data for U.S. Territories: Issues and Resources*, CONGRESS.GOV (Jan. 30, 2026), <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R48522>. The continent that houses the United States has been home to Indigenous Nations since time immemorial. As of 2026, 574 U.S. federally recognized tribes co-exist with the United States. *Tribal and Native American Issues*, U.S. GOV’T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF. <https://www.gao.gov/tribal-and-native-american-issues#:~:text=There%20are%20574%20ethnically%2C%20culturally%2C%20and%20> (last visited Jan. 30, 2026). However, this number does not include the many Indigenous Nations that the U.S. federal government does not recognize, or the Indigenous Nations whose citizens were victims of genocidal campaigns, and so, have been robbed of their right exist. See *Genocide of Indigenous Peoples*, HOLOCAUST MUSEUM HOUS., <https://hnm.org/library/research/genocide-of-indigenous-peoples-guide/> (last visited Jan. 30, 2026) (as one information source regarding this history). Additionally, this number does not include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis who coexist with Canada. *First Nations*, GOV’T CAN., <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100013791/1535470872302> (last visited Jan. 30, 2026).
- 2 See, e.g., generally Tom C.W. Lin, *Americans, Almost and Forgotten*, 107 *Calif. L. Rev.* 1249 (2019), and Karl A. Racine & Leevin T. Camacho, *Op-ed: Dear SCOTUS, 3.5 Million Americans in Territories Deserve Same Federal Benefits*, OFF. ATT’Y GEN. D.C. (Nov. 9, 2021), <https://oag.dc.gov/release/op-ed-dear-scotus-35-million-americans-territories> (for a succinct discussion on some examples of the U.S. federal government’s disparate treatment toward territories-based U.S. citizens); see, e.g., Robert Maxim et al., *The Government Shutdown Shows the Need to Reform How the Federal Government Funds Native American Tribes and Communities*, BROOKINGS (Oct. 28, 2025), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-government-shutdown-shows-the-need-to-reform-how-the-federal-government-funds-native-american-tribes-and-communities/>, and John Echohawk, *Tribal Nations Disproportionately Affected by Federal Funding Freeze*, NATIVE AM. RTS. FUND (Jan. 28, 2025), <https://narf.org/2025-federal-funding/> (addressing the negative impacts the federal government’s actions have on Indigenous Nations).
- 3 Such dynamics may be more pertinent to the existing relationships between Indigenous Nations and U.S. states that neighbor each other. See generally WILLIAM C. CANBY, *AMERICAN INDIAN LAW IN A NUTSHELL* (7th ed. 2020) (discussing these historic dynamics from a legal perspective), and *Fact Sheet: State and Tribal Relationships*, NAT’L CAUCUS ENVTL. LEGISLATORS, <https://www.ncelenviro.org/resources/state-and-tribal-relationships-fact-sheet/> (last visited Feb. 4, 2026) (recommending suggestions to improve relationships between U.S. states and Indigenous Nations).
- 4 This article adopts the definition for ‘mainstream’ as referring to “to researchers, service providers, organizations, systems, etc. that represent the prevailing or dominant values and practices of a society with little or no focus to operate from the worldview of culturally-specific communities.” Ruby White Starr, *Moving from the Mainstream to the Margins: Lessons in Culture and Power*, 33 *J. FAM. VIOLENCE* 551, 551 n.1 (2018).
- 5 The term ‘current’ in this article refers to the “Contemporary Era” or “Modern Era,” which Western historians determine began during the years after World War II. *What Era are We in Currently?*, CU INDEP. (Aug. 18, 2025), <https://www.cuindependent.com/what-era-are-we-in-currently/#:~:text=Historians%20like%20to%20put%20time,technological%20advancement%2C%20and%20global%20interconnectedness.>



6 This article adopts the definition for ‘anti-racist’ as “[o]ne who express[es] the idea that racial groups are equals and none needs developing, and is supporting policy that reduces racial inequity.” IBRAM X. KENDI, *HOW TO BE AN ANTIRACIST* 24 (2019).

7 “Anti-colonialism can be broadly defined as a theoretical framework, analytical tool, and grounded, place-based practice oriented toward resisting, fighting against, and dismantling the aims of colonial regimes, systems, and ideologies . . . . Anti-colonial thinking covers a broad temporal and geographical scope, and it is continually changing and contingent upon current manifestations and interpretation of and resistance to current colonial systems and structures. Given this, anti-colonialism requires ongoing revision, debate, and reconsideration in order to stay relevant.” Neil Nunn & Madeline Whetung, *Anticolonialism*, in *INTERNATIONAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY* 155 (2d ed. 2020).

8 This article adopts the definition for ‘decolonialism’ as the “active[] deconstruct[ion] and challeng[e] [to] colonialism and its systems that do not account for the lives of Indigenous peoples”—and non-Indigenous communities that have also existed within colonialist systems—“reacting to the oppression” these communities and individuals have faced. Isabella Thurston, *Decolonization in Everyday Life*, INDIGENOUS FOUND., <https://www.theindigenousfoundation.org/articles/decolonization-in-everyday-life> (last visited Jan. 27, 2026). “It is vital to always centre definitions and practices of decolonization that come from Indigenous peoples and their meaning of the term.” *Id.* This practice is vital for non-Indigenous peoples who have lived within colonialist structures as well.

9 This article adopts the definition for ‘marginalization’ as the experience by groups and communities “that are and have been confined to a lower status in society due to the unfair structures created by society. Such a group is denied involvement in mainstream economic, political, cultural and social activities, resulting in inequitable outcomes.” *Marginalized Communities*, BOS. MED., <https://www.bmc.org/glossary-culture-transformation/marginalized-communities> (citing *Living Glossary for Racial Justice, Equity & Inclusion*, S. JAM. PLAIN HEALTH CTR. & RACIAL RECONCILIATION & HEAL, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1acNluGSKAJLWYwzCa0TtKciftWE8iKb4y-JZdcGW4zqw/edit?tab=t.0>) (last visited Feb. 6, 2026).

10 The sources that contain contributors’ original communications and feedback for this article are on file with the author. Anonymized versions of these sources can be made available by the author, upon request [hereinafter SFWA].

11 SFWA.

12 *Id.*

13 *Id.*

14 *Id.*

15 *Id.*

16 *Id.*

17 *Id.*

18 *Id.*

19 *Id.*

20 *Id.*

21 *Id.*

22 *Id.*

23 *Id.*

24 *Id.*

25 *Id.*; see, e.g., *U.S. Territories: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (HBO)*, YOUTUBE, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CesHr99ezWE> (last visited Mar. 4, 2026) (discussing specific legal rights the U.S. federal government affords citizens who are residents of its human-inhabited territories). *Supra* note 1.

26 The U.S. federal government identifies an ‘unincorporated territory’ as an “insular area in which the United States Congress has determined that only selected parts of the United States Constitution apply.” *Definitions of Insular Area Political Organizations*, U.S. DEP’T INTERIOR, <https://www.doi.gov/oia/islands/politicaltypes#:~:text=A%20United%20States%20insular%20area%20in%20which%20the%20United%20States.Mariana%20Islands%20and%20Wake%20Atoll> (last visited Feb. 1, 2026).

27 SFWA.

28 *Id.*

29 The federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA) prohibits animal fighting and associated activities, pursuant to 7 U.S.C. § 2156. The U.S. federal government extended the AWA’s enforcement reach to all U.S. territories, pursuant to the Parity in Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, Pub. L. No. 115-334, § 12616, 132 Stat. 4500 (2018).

30 SFWA.

31 *Id.*

32 *Id.*

33 *Id.*

34 *Id.*

35 *Id.*

36 See generally *Funding and Programs Meant to Help Tribes May Not Be Reaching Them*, U.S. GOV’T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF. (Dec. 3, 2024), <https://www.gao.gov/blog/funding-and-programs-meant-help-tribes-may-not-be-reaching-them>.

37 SFWA.

38 *Id.*

39 *Id.*

40 *Id.*

41 *Id.*

42 *Id.*



43 *Id.*  
44 *Id.*  
45 *Id.*  
46 *Id.*  
47 *Id.*  
48 *Id.*  
49 *Id.*  
50 *Id.*  
51 *Id.*  
52 *Id.*  
53 *Id.*  
54 *Id.*  
55 *Id.*  
56 *Id.*  
57 *Id.*  
58 *Id.*  
59 *Id.*  
60 *Id.*  
61 *Id.*  
62 *Id.*

63 *Id.*  
64 *Id.*  
65 When offering trainings, ensure the trainings' content, context, and infrastructure are customized to the audiences' respective cultures, geographic location(s), political environment(s) and dynamic(s), and their realistic access to resources.  
66 SFWA.  
67 *Id.*  
68 See, e.g., ANIMAL WELFARE OBSERVATORY, <https://animalwelfareobservatory.org/> (last visited Feb. 6, 2026) (describing the observatory as an "organization that challenges the regulations of today's food industry to make it healthy, sustainable and free of animal suffering"), and NUP Human Rights Observatory, NEAPOLIS U. PAFOS, [https://www.nup.ac.cy/research/nup-human-rights-observatory/#:~:text=The%20Observatory%20is%20a%20system%20for%20monitoring,Cyprus%20\(%20Republic%20of%20Cyprus%20\)%20](https://www.nup.ac.cy/research/nup-human-rights-observatory/#:~:text=The%20Observatory%20is%20a%20system%20for%20monitoring,Cyprus%20(%20Republic%20of%20Cyprus%20)%20) (last visited Jan. 30, 2026) (explaining the observatory's intent to "promote and protect human rights in the Republic of Cyprus").  
69 SFWA.  
70 *Id.*  
71 *Id.*  
72 *Id.*  
73 *Id.*  
74 *Id.*  
75 *Id.*



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*Law As... Continued from page 22*

Commission, and I quickly fell in love with horse racing and equine law. From then on, my path became clear. I naturally became involved in the legal area related to service animals, inspired by my own service dog, which involves reasonable accommodations and disability-related legal issues. I also discovered that I thrive in policy and regulatory work because I enjoy the relative clarity of administrative frameworks. Along the way, I realized I genuinely enjoy litigation and client advocacy. Each of these decisions and discoveries stemmed directly from my lived experiences, combined with a strong self-awareness of work that aligns with my strengths and values.

My experience isn't unique. Attorney Jeremy Cohen of Boston Dog Lawyers<sup>1</sup> shared that he went to law school too soon and felt he had nothing special to offer until he gained life experience. He described working in a drive-through and coaching basketball after law school, feeling as though he underachieved for a long time because he hadn't yet discovered his passion. Everything changed when he found his purpose in animal law, advocating for dogs and their owners. Once he began doing work that mattered to him, practicing law became challenging and interesting, and he succeeded because there was finally passion driving the effort. Jeremy prefers hiring second-career attorneys because they know what they want and are more likely to stay committed to the work.

Years of juggling multiple jobs, supervising employees, and managing complex schedules shaped my professional approach long before I entered law school. Coordinating staff, resolving workplace conflicts, and maintaining daily operations taught me how to handle personalities, expectations, and crises with skills that many new attorneys have not yet had the chance to develop.

Jeremy reflected on a similar lesson during his own gap year after law school, when he worked in a fast-food drive-through. He described the experience as grounding and humbling, believing that early, real-world work would give him a depth of understanding that classroom learning failed to provide. Looking back on my early career in recreation and aquatics, I see that I underperformed in some ways, just as Jeremy did while trying to find his place in the profession. Nevertheless, those years taught us both resilience, humility, and client management skills that now form the foundation of our work as legal professionals.

Attorney Jessica Schultz of Schultz Law<sup>2</sup> offered similar insight. She also started law school in her thirties and told me, "Time would have passed anyway, so I might as well have spent it doing something impactful." She worked full-time while earning her degree, which taught her to focus and manage her time. That decision also allowed her to graduate debt-free, giving her more flexibility in her career choices and the freedom to pursue work that aligns with her values.



These experiences reflect a broader reality. Professionalism is reinforced by maturity, self-awareness, and real-world experience. These traits often originate from careers we held before attending law school. For many of us, entering the legal field later in life means coming in with a clearer sense of purpose and a deeper understanding of what it takes to serve clients effectively. Second-career attorneys are not at a disadvantage—they are fully prepared. The skills gained in previous careers serve as the foundation for ethical, thoughtful, and effective legal work. Genuine professionalism stems from experience, perspective, and the steady confidence that only time can develop. ➤

**Endnotes**

- 1 BOSTON DOG LAWYERS, <https://www.bostondoglawyers.com/> (last visited Jan. 28, 2026).
- 2 SCHULTZ LAW, <https://www.schultzlawtn.com/> (last visited Jan. 28, 2026).

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