

# The Connecticut General Assembly

## House Democrats



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## **Rep. Urban Calls for Animal Advocates in Court Proceedings**

**State Representative Diana Urban (D-Stonington, North Stonington)** held a press conference alongside fellow legislators, several animal advocate groups and local activists in support of Desmond's Law (HB 6187) **on the day that the record of Desmond's abuser was officially expunged.** Desmond was a shelter dog that was hanged to death several years ago and then thrown in a discarded bag in Madison, Connecticut by his owner.

Animal abuse cases are handled very differently than human abuse cases in court, with very few even being heard. Yet many of the most recent school shooters in the last 10 years were found to have abused animals before moving to harming humans. Desmond's abuser completed an accelerated rehabilitation program and as of April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015 has a clean criminal record.

"The sheer violence of the attack against Desmond demands a more serious response. The FBI now considers animal cruelty a top-tier felony and a 'crime against society.' It is in the same class as arson and assault," said Rep. Urban. "The accepted link between animal cruelty and child abuse and domestic violence is one more reason to take these violent crimes against animals seriously. Desmond's Law will put a much-needed spotlight on animal cruelty."

Rep. Urban's bill aims to address this problem by allowing law students to serve as animal advocates in court for animals that are being used in custody or abuse cases. The animals benefit because they are given an advocate, and the law students benefit because they are given real-life court experience.

"HB 6187 provides a win-win situation. As advocates, law students would have meaningful and educational roles in court, serving the public interest with energy and passion, and courts would receive help in handling complicated cases," said UConn Law Professor Jessica Rubin.

"The appointment of court advocates to represent the interests of animal cruelty victims is long overdue. Sadly, justice in these cases is rare, the great majority of them resulting in no meaningful consequences, even for the most serious offenders. The ASPCA urges Connecticut lawmakers to support

this legislation because the most vulnerable among us deserve a voice in our justice system,” said Debora Bresch, ASPCA’s Senior Legislative Director.

"Desmond's Law has great potential to improve our justice system, and ultimately protect both animals and people from violence. There is abundant evidence that suggests those who are violent toward animals, are also likely to be violent toward people. A 2000 study found that 70% of people charged with cruelty to animals were known by police for other violent behavior, including homicide. Desmond's Law will help identify these criminals so that we can appropriately treat them, and more effectively stop the cycle of violence," said Amy Harrell, President of CT Votes for Animals.

HB 6187 is currently awaiting a vote from the legislature’s Judiciary Committee.

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*Representative Urban serves Stonington and North Stonington’s 43<sup>rd</sup> Assembly District, and is the House Chair of the legislature’s Children’s Committee.*