

Connecticut's Animal Cruelty Laws and Other Animal Protection Laws

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Issue

Summarize Connecticut's animal cruelty laws and other animal protection laws. This report updates and expands upon OLR Report [2019-R-0196](#).

Summary

Connecticut law prohibits many abusive behaviors toward animals and provides different penalties based on the severity of the abuse and the abuser's intent.

Connecticut's primary animal cruelty statute is comprised of five distinct crimes: cruelty to animals, malicious or intentional cruelty to animals, knowingly engaging in the exhibition of animal fighting, and intentionally injuring or killing police animals or dogs in volunteer canine service and rescue teams ([CGS § 53-247](#), as amended by [PA 23-149](#)). Additionally, a 2023 law makes "sexual assault of an animal" a distinct crime.

Other animal cruelty laws specifically address cruelty to poultry; docking of horses' tails; sale or gift of dyed fowl or rabbits; sale or treatment of animals unable to work; transportation of animals on railroads; and use of animals, reptiles, and birds for financial gain.

Animal cruelty violators face maximum prison terms ranging from 30 days to 10 years, fines ranging from \$200 to \$10,000, or both. In addition to these penalties, for the five primary animal cruelty crimes and sexually assaulting an animal, the law requires the court to prohibit, for five

years, the person convicted of the crime from (1) having or living with any animal or (2) working or volunteering in a position that involves caring for or regularly contacting an animal.

In the case of certain violations related to companion animals, the law establishes general penalties that apply when none is specified. The law also prescribes a process for removing a neglected or cruelly treated animal from its owner.

Lastly, there are other laws that relate to animal care and protection, examples of which are those on the Animal Population Control Program, dog tethering and sheltering, and municipal or regional dog pound standards.

Primary Animal Cruelty Law

Cruelty to Animals

[CGS § 53-247\(a\)](#) prohibits people from overdriving, overloading, overworking, torturing, depriving of sustenance, mutilating, cruelly beating or killing, or unjustifiably injuring any animal. The law prohibits a person who impounds or confines an animal from (1) failing to provide it with proper care; (2) neglecting to cage or restrain it from injuring itself or another animal; or (3) failing to provide it with wholesome air, food, and water.

The statute also bans unjustifiably administering or exposing a domestic animal to any poisonous or noxious drug or substance intending the animal to take it. Individuals who have custody of an animal may not treat it cruelly; fail to provide it with proper food, drink, or shelter; abandon it; or carry or cause it to be carried in a cruel manner. Fighting with or baiting, harassing, or worrying an animal to make it perform for amusement, diversion, or exhibition is also prohibited.

A first violation of any of the above provisions is punishable by up to one year in prison, a fine of up to \$1,000, or both. Each subsequent offense is a class D felony, punishable by up to five years in prison, a fine of up to \$5,000, both.

Malicious or Intentional Cruelty to Animals

Under [CGS § 53-247\(b\)](#), it is a class D felony for a first offense, and class C felony for subsequent offenses, to maliciously and intentionally maim, mutilate, torture, wound, or kill an animal. This law does not apply to:

1. licensed veterinarians following accepted practice standards;
2. persons following approved slaughter methods;

3. students, employees, or persons performing medical research and associated with a hospital, educational institution, or laboratory; and
4. persons following generally accepted agricultural practices or lawfully taking wildlife.

A class C felony is punishable by 1 to 10 years in prison, a fine of up to \$10,000, or both.

Engaging in Exhibition of Animal Fighting

Under [CGS § 53-247\(c\)](#), it is a class D felony to knowingly commit any of the following actions:

1. own, possess, keep, or train an animal engaged in fighting for amusement or gain;
2. possess, keep, or train an animal to fight in an exhibition for amusement or gain;
3. allow any of the above acts to occur on premises under one's control;
4. act as a judge or spectator at an exhibition; or
5. bet or wager on the outcome of an exhibition.

Intentionally Injuring or Killing Police Animals or Dogs in Volunteer Canine Service and Rescue Teams

Under [CGS § 53-247\(d\)](#), intentionally injuring (1) an animal performing its duties under a peace officer's supervision or (2) a dog performing its duties as a member of a volunteer canine search and rescue team is a class D felony. And [CGS § 53-247\(e\)](#) makes intentionally killing either animal punishable by up to 10 years in prison, a fine of up to \$10,000, or both.

A law enacted during the 2024 legislative session additionally requires the offender to pay restitution to the animal's owner. The restitution may include the cost of veterinary services and, if the animal or dog is killed or rendered unable to perform its duties, the costs and expenses of purchasing and training a replacement ([PA 24-65](#), effective October 1, 2024).

Sexual Assault of an Animal

A 2023 law makes it a class A misdemeanor to sexually assault an animal, punishable by up to 364 days in prison, a fine up to \$2,000, or both. A person commits "sexual assault of an animal" when he or she knowingly, and for the purpose of the person's or another person's sexual gratification (1) engages in sexual contact with an animal or forces another person to do so or (2) creates or distributes pornographic images of prohibited sexual contact with an animal ([PA 23-149](#), § 2,

codified at [CGS § 53a-73b](#)). (Previously, a person who engaged in sexual contact with an animal was guilty of 4th degree sexual assault, which is also a class A misdemeanor.)

Additional Penalties for Certain Animal Cruelty Crimes

For the five distinct primary animal cruelty crimes (see above) and the crime of sexual assault of an animal, a 2023 law requires the court, in addition to imposing the existing applicable criminal penalty, to issue an order prohibiting a convicted offender from:

1. harboring, owning, possessing, living with, adopting, or serving as a foster placement for any animal; and
2. being employed by, or volunteering for, any entity in any position that involves care for, or regular contact with, any animal.

The order must be for the five-year period beginning on the later of the date of conviction or the date of the person's release from imprisonment for the conviction ([CGS § 53-247\(f\)](#), as amended by [PA 23-149](#)).

Other Animal Cruelty Laws

Cruelty to Poultry

Under [CGS § 53-249](#), any container used to transport, ship, or hold live poultry for sale must be (1) in a sanitary condition and (2) constructed to provide sufficient ventilation and warmth. When live poultry is in the container, it must receive reasonable care required to prevent unnecessary suffering. A violation is a class D misdemeanor, punishable by up to 30 days in prison, fines up to \$250, or both.

Docking of Horses' Tails

[CGS § 53-251](#) prohibits anyone, except registered veterinarians performing necessary operations, from:

1. cutting the bone of a horse's tail for the purpose of docking it (i.e., cutting the tail very short);
2. cutting the muscles or tendons of a horse's tail, or otherwise operating upon it in any manner for the purpose or with the effect of altering the tail's natural carriage;
3. causing or knowingly allowing this cutting or operation to be done on premises of which he or she is the owner, lessee, proprietor, or user; or
4. assisting in or being present at the cutting or operation.

Violators are subject to up to one year in prison, a fine of up to \$300, or both.

Sale or Gift of Dyed Fowl or Rabbits

Under [CGS § 53-249a](#), anyone who sells, offers for sale at retail, or gives away live chickens, ducklings, other fowl, or rabbits that were dyed, colored, or otherwise given an artificial color, must be fined up to \$150.

Sale or Treatment of Animals Unable to Work

[CGS § 53-248](#) prohibits:

1. selling, offering to sell, trading, or giving away a horse to be worked that could not be worked in Connecticut without violating the state's primary animal cruelty law (see above) and
2. leading, riding, or driving an animal on a public highway except to take the animal to a suitable place for its humane keeping or killing or for medical or surgical treatment.

Violators are subject to up to six months in prison, a fine of up to \$200, or both.

Transporting Animals on Railroads

[CGS § 53-252](#) prohibits railroad companies, in transporting animals, from confining them in cars for more than 28 consecutive hours without unloading the animals for food, water, and rest for at least five consecutive hours, unless a storm or other accidental cause prevents it. The law makes an exception for situations in which the animals are transported in cars in which they have proper food, water, space, and the opportunity to rest. Violators are subject to a fine of up to \$500.

Use of Animals, Reptiles, and Birds for Certain Financial Gain

Under [CGS § 53-250](#), it is a class D misdemeanor for anyone to:

1. use an animal, reptile, or bird to solicit alms, collection, contribution, subscription, donation, or payment of money;
2. use an animal or bird as a prize or award in a game or device;
3. exhibit a wild animal to attract business; or
4. own, keep, or have an animal, reptile, or bird in custody for any of these purposes.

This does not apply to using animals in exhibitions by an educational institution, in a zoological garden, or connected with a theatrical exhibition or circus. It also does not apply to using an animal in a cow-chip raffle.

Additionally, the legislature passed a law in the 2024 session that changes existing gaming and solicitation laws regarding the use of animals. The act (1) specifies that bazaars and raffles may not use animals as prizes; (2) prohibits reptiles from being a prize or award for operating any game or device; and (3) specifies that an animal includes a fish for the purposes of certain prohibited solicitations, gaming prizes and awards, and business attractions ([PA 24-142](#), §§ 89 & 90, effective October 1, 2024).

General Penalty for Companion Animal Violations

By law, when a person owning, keeping, or harboring a cat or dog or maintaining a kennel or commercial kennel violates a provision of [Chapter 435 of the general statutes](#) (i.e., laws related to companion animals) or a regulation about restraining or destroying cats or dogs, for which there is no specified penalty, a general penalty is imposed. The penalty is a fine of at least \$250, up to 30 days in prison, or both.

A 2023 law applied this general penalty to a violation of any regulation, not just those on restraining or destroying cats or dogs. It also made animal control officers (ACOs) responsible for enforcing the chapter's provisions, instead of constables ([CGS § 22-367](#), as amended by [PA 23-17](#), § 10).

Removing an Abused or Neglected Animal From its Owner

By law, if an ACO reasonably believes that an animal is neglected or cruelly treated, the officer may take custody of it and petition the court to remove the animal from its owner. The court may order temporary custody, at which point the owner may either relinquish the animal or pay a bond to the custodial person or agency.

If the court makes a neglect or cruelty finding within 30 days after the temporary custody order, a portion of the bond must be returned to the original owner at a specified daily rate, for the days less than 30 that the person or agency had temporary custody of the animal, less any veterinary costs and expenses incurred for the animal's welfare. After the court makes its finding, if it does not order the animal euthanized, it may vest ownership to the Department of Agriculture (DoAg) commissioner or a municipality and they may auction the animal or vest ownership of it in an individual or a public or private nonprofit animal rescue or adoption organization ([CGS § 22-329a](#), as amended by [PA 23-149](#), § 5).

A law passed in the 2024 legislative session also (1) increases, by \$5, the daily rate for calculating at the return of the bonds (now \$20, or \$30 for certain larger animals) and (2) establishes confidentiality protections for the animal's new owner ([PA 24-108](#), § 27, effective October 1, 2024).

Other Selected Animal Protection Laws

Animal Population Control Program

The state's [Animal Population Control Program](#) (APCP) pays for things such as dog or cat sterilization, immunizations, and ACO education and law enforcement.

A new law allows a municipal pound to use a voucher from the APCP to get any dog or cat, rather than only ones with pyometra, sterilized and vaccinated before the animal is purchased or adopted from the pound ([PA 24-69](#), § 3, effective upon passage). The law requires the DoAg commissioner to update the reimbursement amount paid to participating veterinarians, at a rate up to 75% of the market rate or fee charged by veterinarians in Connecticut ([CGS § 22-380i](#), as amended by [PA 23-17](#), § 17).

Dog Tethering and Sheltering

By law, dogs that are outside for more than 15 minutes must be provided adequate shelter during a weather advisory or warning or when outdoor environmental conditions put a dog's health or safety at risk. The law also prohibits tethering dogs to stationary objects or mobile devices without providing potable water at least twice in a 24-hour period. Violators are subject to fines of between \$100 and \$500, depending on the offense ([CGS § 22-350a](#)).

Municipal or Regional Dog Pound Standards

Under a 2023 law, municipal or regional dog pounds must have mechanical heating and cooling systems that can maintain an indoor ambient temperature between 55 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit, unless a state-licensed veterinarian requires other temperatures for medical reasons. It also imposes additional rules for how these pounds keep cats and dogs (e.g., generally prohibiting kittens and puppies from being kept with adult cats and dogs) and authorizes the DoAg commissioner to enforce the requirements ([PA 23-138](#)).

Service Animals

In 2024, the legislature generally (1) broadened the applicability of protections and provisions related to guide dogs or assistance dogs by replacing references to these animals with a federal definition for "service animals" and (2) extended other provisions to service animals in training. It also broadened the coverage for many of these provisions to include individuals with physical, intellectual, mental, or learning disabilities as defined under state law.

Among other provisions, the new law eliminates requirements that (1) service animals wear a harness or an orange-colored leash and (2) service animals in training be identified through tags,

tattoos, bandanas, coats, leashes, or collars. Further, it requires the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities to post educational materials on service animals, emotional support animals, and therapy animals ([PA 24-18](#), effective July 1, 2024).

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