

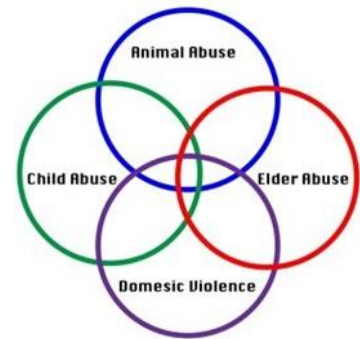
"The Link" between Animal Cruelty, Child Maltreatment, and other forms of Violence



April is Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Month. Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz, Chief Administrator of Behavioral Health and Wellbeing Dr. Nicole Taylor, Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture Bryan Hurlburt, Legislators, and other community partners, recently brought attention to the strong correlation between animal cruelty, child maltreatment and other forms of interpersonal violence – referred to as “The Link.”

Connecticut has taken proactive steps to address "The Link," and passed [a law](#) in 2011 requiring a coordinated agency response involving the Department of Agriculture (DOAG) and Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Expanded in 2014, the law requires DCF staff and state, regional, and municipal Animal Control Officers (ACO) to work together to “cross report” to DOAG when they reasonably suspect that animal cruelty and child abuse and neglect has occurred. Conversely, as part of this law, DOAG is mandated to forward all animal cruelty reports to DCF for assessment and possible commencement of an investigation to determine the safety of children in the home who may have been exposed to animal cruelty.



"Just like our children, animals are extremely vulnerable to abuse and neglect regardless of the community in which they reside. And just like our children, we must do everything we can to protect them from acts of cruelty," said DCF Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly. "That is why for this reason, we are being proactive about increasing staff knowledge, enhancing data collection, and strengthening the cross-reporting partnership with DOAG to address the 'Link' relationship. This includes mandatory training of our frontline staff, so they know exactly what to look for when visiting a home. We are grateful to this administration, our DOAG counterparts and our advocacy partners for their support in working to protect the most vulnerable members of our communities."



**DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE**

“Through our collaborative approach with DCF and other state and municipal partners we are working to increase education and outreach of the connection between child abuse and animal cruelty. The cross-reporting tools have been integral in ensuring the wellbeing of children and animals,” said DOAG Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt.

In 2023, DOAG sent DCF more than 90 reports to DCF while, in that same year, DCF sent a total of 60 reports to DOAG. Last year, "The Link" was apparent with 17 percent of reports meeting the standard for an abuse/neglect investigation based on the initial information provided in the written report.

The state has seen demonstrated increases in animal cruelty reports over the past several years due in part to increased education and outreach efforts by both DCF and DOAG. For example, DCF has made cross reporting a part of the agency's in-person and online mandated reporter training. More recently, across its 14 offices, DCF has also more than doubled the number of cross reporting liaisons who are responsible for helping to triage cases between DCF social workers and ACOs as well as provide monthly training and educational support to staff.



Here is the cross-reporting guide for DCF staff: [Cross Reporting Guide for DCF Staff](#)



Additionally, [Paws for Kids](#) is a partnership between DCF and the animal advocacy community to promote child and animal well-being through education, cross reporting efforts, marketing, and establishing Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) for DCF children with trauma.

A partner in these efforts, [Desmond's Army](#) Animal Law Advocates is a group of volunteers committed to impacting animal welfare legislation and raising public awareness regarding the statistical connection between animal abuse and domestic and social violence.

"Animal cruelty is a gateway crime to human violence. Research shows that animal abuse is linked to domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and other crimes against people. When animal crimes are addressed, our communities are safer," said Robin "Zilla" Cannamela, President / Co-Founder of Desmond's Army Animal Law Advocates.

The partnership between DOAG and DCF Careline continues to be strengthened to ensure reports are received immediately allowing DCF to proceed as necessary and DOAG to close the loop with local ACOs. This year, the agencies began collecting more comprehensive data on animal cruelty occurring in open/prior DCF cases to garner a more complete understanding of "The Link" relationship.



"To enhance the safety and well-being of children, animals, other family members and the community, it is incumbent on us all to identify and report cases of abuse as soon as possible," said Lt. Governor Bysiewicz. "I am grateful for the partnership and leadership of the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Agriculture in addressing these horrific offenses with a proactive, collaborative response."

A review of national research shows:

- Animals were harmed in 88% of homes where a child was physically abused.
- 75% of female survivors of domestic violence in one study reported their pets were threatened or intentionally harmed by their partner.
- Children exposed to domestic violence are three times more likely to be cruel to animals.
- 45% of caseworkers working with the elderly encountered animal abuse or neglect co-occurring with elder abuse.

Members of the public can make a reports of animal cruelty directly to the local Animal Control Department in the town where the concerns have been noted or by calling (860) 713-2506 as well as via e-mail at AGR.AnimalControl@ct.gov. Those wishing to make a report can remain anonymous.

A reasonable suspicion of child maltreatment can be made to the Child Abuse and Neglect Careline by dialing 1-800-842-2288. The Careline is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Callers to the Careline can remain anonymous.