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ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE

**TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO 21-H 5617
AN ACT RELATING TO ANIMALS AND ANIMAL HUSBANDRY –
CRUELTY TO ANIMALS
March 3, 2021**

The ACLU opposes H 5617, which would increase penalties for people convicted of unnecessary cruelty on an animal. We oppose this legislation because it is unduly harsh and unnecessary.

Only a few years ago, the General Assembly enacted legislation similar to this bill, codified in R.I.G.L. §4-1-40, and we do not believe there is any compelling reason to revisit that legislation so soon and make the penalties even harsher than they already are. That law already restricts a convicted individual from “possessing or residing” with an animal for up to five years. The penalties contained in this legislation expand it considerably, and would forbid a person from “harbor[ing], own[ing], possess[ing], exercis[ing] control over, adopt[ing], or foster[ing] an animal” for *life*, giving the court no discretion to determine the terms of punishment.

What this means is that a teenager convicted of cruelty to animals under this bill would not be able to raise a family thirty years later with a pet of any kind. This type of punishment is wholly unreasonable, inappropriate, and unjust.

Given the more-than-sufficient punishments currently in place for violations of this chapter, we urge rejection of this piece of legislation. Thank you for your consideration.