

## New Jersey Considers Animal Cruelty Law Changes

**A New Jersey Assemblyman wants to expand laws against dogfighting, hoarding and tethering dogs.**

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A New Jersey state Assemblyman says he wants to completely restructure the state's animal cruelty statute and stiffen penalties for violators.

Jeff Van Drew, D-Cape May, says the section of state law that deals with the abuse and mistreatment of animals does not extend far enough and needs to be updated and expanded.

New Jersey's animal cruelty laws were established in 1880 and have not kept pace with modern cruelty cases involving dogfighting or using animals to smuggle drugs, said Van Drew, who owns two dogs.

Van Drew is teaming with state law enforcement officials and animal welfare advocates to drum up support for legislation that would overhaul the state's animal cruelty laws for the first time in over 125 years.

The legislation, A-2649, is nicknamed "Angel's Law" in memory of a South Jersey dog that died after being starved and beaten by its owner. The bill would make inhumane acts against animals specific criminal offenses and significantly increase criminal and civil penalties for violations.

"Atrocities like dog fighting, abandonment, and improper euthanization need to be treated like other felonies – with harsh penalties," Van Drew said at a state House press conference.

Among other things, Van Drew's bill would: Expand laws against animal fighting, subjecting people who sponsor or profit from dogfights to tougher penalties than those who simply watch. Add penalties for those who allow children 16 or younger to witness violence against animals. Add a section on hoarding, where owners take in a very large number of animals that they can't care for. Establish standards for tethering dogs to a tree or post: The amount of time a dog could be tethered would not exceed 10 hours out of 24, fastened with a harness or buckle-type collar on a chain or tether at least 15 feet long. Establish penalties for abandoning an animal after taking it to a veterinarian or animal care facility.

Under the bill, first-degree offenders would be subject to mandatory mental health counseling, community service and civil penalties, possible forfeiture of all animals owned by that individual, and prohibition from ever owning an animal again.

The bill has cleared an Assembly committee, but has yet to be considered by the full Assembly or state Senate.