

## Utah Senate Passes Animal Cruelty Bill

**If passed, the new law will make the deliberate torture of a cat or dog a third-degree felony in the state.**

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Last week, the Utah State Senate passed SB 297, a bill that would make it a felony to torture domestic cats and dogs. Sponsored by Senator Allen Christensen (R-North Ogden), the bill, if passed, would make Utah the 44th state to have a felony-level animal torture law.

Utah state legislators have addressed the issue of animal torture several times over the past year. SB 102, which makes torture of an animal a felony offense, was not given a hearing. SB 117, which would amend provisions of the Utah Criminal Code relating to animal cruelty and was opposed by many state animal welfare groups, was passed by one vote in the Senate and is currently awaiting vote in the House of Representatives. HB 470, introduced by Rep. Sheryl Allen (R-Davis), was held up after going before the House Judiciary Committee.

SB 297 is a "compromise bill" that addresses the issues voiced by legislators over the previous bills. Having passed the Senate by a vote of 21-6, the bill now goes before the House of Representatives.

"This is a landmark action," said Gene Baierschmidt, executive director of the Humane Society of Utah. "It's important because it finally puts some real teeth in the state's animal-protection laws without weakening the statutes that are already in place."