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PRESS RELEASE

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Cooper Takes a Bite Out of Animal Crimes

Legislature Adopts Nation's First Animal Abuser Registry

RIVERHEAD, NY – In the face of an explosion of animal abuse being reported locally, today the Suffolk County Legislature unanimously approved a bill authored by Majority Leader Jon Cooper (D-Lloyd Harbor) that will create a public Animal Abuser Registry listing the names of those convicted of inhumane treatment and torture of animals. The adoption of Cooper's law makes Suffolk County the first municipality in the nation to have such a registry on the books.

Cooper's law creates the nation's first publicly accessible and searchable database of those convicted of animal abuse crimes (as defined by the New York State Penal Code), similar to the kind in place for sex offenders. Convicted abusers will have to register their names, aliases, addresses and submit their photograph for inclusion in the database. They will also be required to update their personal information annually or any time they change their address. Appearance in the registry will be mandated for five years following an abuser's incarceration or judgment. Those failing to register during that period would be subject to a \$1,000 fine and/or up to a year in jail.

And all of this will be done at no cost to taxpayers. That's because the Suffolk County SPCA has agreed to set up the registry and animal abusers will foot the bill for the upkeep by paying a \$50 annual fee. SPCA peace officers already enforce the New York State Agriculture and Market Laws with regard to the prevention of mistreatment and cruelty to animals.

"This bill will provide the ammunition needed to fight the ongoing war against animal abusers," says Suffolk County SPCA Chief of Department Roy Gross. "Let Jon's law be a model for other municipalities, not only in New York State, but throughout the nation."

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Animal rights advocates whom have unsuccessfully fought to have this law adopted in other states were ecstatic over Cooper's accomplishment.

"We are elated that Suffolk County, through the strong leadership of Legislator Jon Cooper, has enacted the first animal abuser registry law in the nation," says Stephan Otto, attorney and legislative affairs director for the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF). "We strongly applaud Suffolk County and are confident that other counties and states will take notice and soon follow suit."

Ten years ago the ALDF was the first animal rights organization to champion the idea of animal abuser registry. The ALDF has blazed the trail for stronger enforcement of anti-cruelty laws and more humane treatment of animals in every corner of American life. "Animal abuser registries are practical crime-reducing and cost-savings tools which, owing to the strong correlation between those who abuse animals and those who are violent towards humans, benefit communities by helping to reduce the risk of new animal and human victims at the hands of repeat offenders," Otto continues.

The ALDF is right. Cooper's initiatives have the potential to go beyond protecting just pets. For more than a quarter of a century, studies have shown a strong corollary between animal abuse and human violence. The American Psychiatric Association considers animal cruelty one of the diagnostic criteria of conduct disorder, and the U.S. Department of Justice uses animal abuse as a marker for youth at risk of violent behavior.

Consider these high-profile cases:

- Jeffrey Dahmer impaled the heads of pets on sticks.
- Ted Bundy described watching his grandfather torture animals.
- David Berkowitz, the Son of Sam, poisoned his mother's parakeet.
- Albert DeSalvo, the Boston Strangler, trapped pets in orange crates and shot arrows through the boxes.
- The young shooters at Columbine High School had bragged about mutilating animals.

Cooper has already authored a follow-up bill to the Animal Abuser Registry. It would require pet stores, breeders and animal shelters to check the identity of those seeking to purchase or adopt pets against the registry and would prohibit them from allowing a convicted abuser to leave with the pet.

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