



2015 U.S. Animal Protection Laws Rankings™

Comparing Overall Strength & Comprehensiveness

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2015 U.S. ANIMAL PROTECTION LAWS RANKINGS™

Animal Legal Defense Fund Annual Study Ranks Laws Across the Country

New Jersey Most-Improved State, New Dogfighting Provisions

Trends include Protective Orders for Animals and Reckless Endangerment Prohibitions

December 2015

The Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) announces the publication of the 2015 U.S. ANIMAL PROTECTION LAWS RANKINGS REPORT, ALDF's tenth annual report that comprehensively surveys animal protection laws of all U.S. states and territories. The longest-running and most authoritative report of its kind, the RANKINGS REPORT assesses the strength of each jurisdiction's animal protection laws by examining over 4,000 pages of statutes.¹ Each jurisdiction receives a raw score based on fifteen different categories of animal protection; the REPORT then ranks all 56 jurisdictions by comparing their raw scores. The REPORT also highlights the top, middle, and bottom tiers of jurisdictions and notes the "Best Five" and "Worst Five" states overall.

The "Best Five" states remained the same in 2015, for the eighth consecutive year, with Illinois holding strong as the top jurisdiction for animal protection. New Jersey was the most-improved state in 2015, jumping twenty-eight places in rank, in part, by passing a comprehensive dogfighting law that increased penalties and made dogfighting a RICO offense. All 50 states have felony provisions for animal fighting, and now eight states make fighting a RICO offense.

"Make no mistake—animal fighters operate as organized criminal enterprises, using a host of sophisticated techniques to disguise their illegal conduct," says Scott Heiser, Director of ALDF's Criminal Justice Program. "The crimes affiliated with the blood-sport industry are more than worthy of prosecution under state RICO laws, and we applaud New Jersey for making that possibility a reality in the Garden State."

The 2015 RANKINGS REPORT also highlights legislation allowing for animals to be included in protective orders. Ohio enacted such a provision this year, bringing the total to 29 states, in addition to the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, that now protect animals in situations of domestic violence.

"The Link between violence to human and animal victims is undeniable," says Lora Dunn, Staff Attorney for ALDF's Criminal Justice Program. "Domestic violence offenders manipulate human victims by threatening harm to their animals, making those human victims even less likely to leave their abusers out of fears for their animals' safety. Protective order legislation, by

¹ See page 18 of the report for a summary of the methodology used.

empowering judges to include animals in protective orders along with human victims, can be life-changing for those caught in the cycle of domestic violence.”

Other notable changes this year included Oklahoma’s and Pennsylvania’s increased penalties for harming a police animal, Colorado’s increased animal fighting penalties, Delaware’s new prohibition on leaving an animal unattended in a motor vehicle, and Tennessee’s new law providing civil immunity for forcibly removing an animal from a hot car. Seventeen states and the Virgin Islands now have laws that prohibit reckless conduct, such as leaving an animal in a hot car. For the ninth year in a row, Kentucky remained the worst state for animal protection.

In reviewing the results from ALDF’s RANKINGS REPORTS over the past five years, more than three quarters of all states and territories experienced a significant improvement in their animal protection laws:

- ✓ **13%** of jurisdictions improved 2-10%
- ✓ **64%** of jurisdictions improved 11-50%
- ✓ **4%** of jurisdictions improved by greater than

50% These improvements included, among others:

- Expanding the range of protections for animals
- Providing stiffer penalties for offenders
- Strengthening standards of care for animals
- Reporting of animal cruelty cases by veterinarians and other professionals
- Mitigating and recovering costs associated with the care of mistreated animals
- Requiring mental health evaluations and counseling for offenders
- Banning ownership of animals following convictions
- Including animals in domestic violence protective orders
- Including animal fighting as a RICO (racketeering) offense

One of the frequently used measures for gauging the state of animal protection laws in the U.S. has been the presence or absence of felony-level penalties for the most egregious types of abuse. Since ALDF released its first U.S. rankings report in 2006, there has been noticeable progress in this indicator:

- **Ten jurisdictions** added—for the first time—felony penalties for cases involving extreme animal cruelty or torture: *Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Mississippi, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Utah.*

- **Eight jurisdictions** strengthened their existing felony animal cruelty laws: *Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Nebraska, Nevada, Ohio, and Puerto Rico.*
- **Fifteen jurisdictions** added felonies for repeated or aggravated animal neglect: *Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, Puerto Rico, and Tennessee.*
- **Eight jurisdictions** made repeated abandonment, or abandonment that results in the death or serious injury of an animal, a felony: *Arkansas, Connecticut, Idaho, Louisiana, Indiana, Michigan, Nebraska, and Puerto Rico.*
- **Three jurisdictions** added felonies for the sexual assault of an animal: *Alaska, Puerto Rico, and Tennessee.*
- **Nineteen jurisdictions** instituted statewide bans on breed-specific legislation (or “BSL”) by either prohibiting municipalities from regulating or outlawing certain dogs based on breed alone, or otherwise require proof of a dog’s supposed dangerous propensities beyond mere breed: *California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, Nevada, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Texas, Utah* , Virginia, and Washington.*

Sizable majorities of all households now include at least one animal, and polls continue to show that the public cares deeply about animal welfare. ALDF’s goals in these ongoing reviews are to continue to shed light on the important issue of animal protection, to compare and contrast the differences and similarities in the provinces and territories, and to garner support for strengthening and enforcing animal protection laws throughout the country.

ALDF encourages those who care about the welfare and protection of animals to contact their elected officials about the importance of having strong, comprehensive laws in this field, and to alert law enforcement should they ever witness animal abuse or neglect.

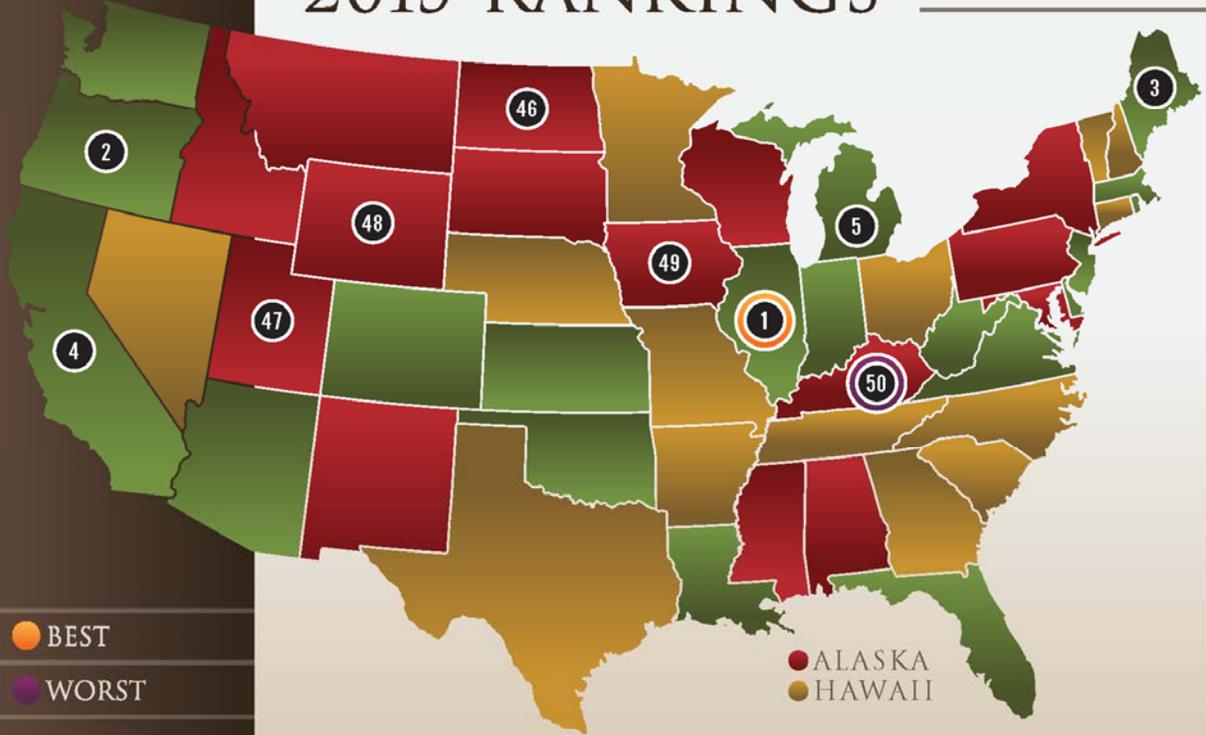
Please visit aldf.org for additional information, including the ANIMAL PROTECTION LAWS OF THE USA & CANADA compendium, MODEL ANIMAL PROTECTION LAWS collection, and more.

* denotes new changes in 2015



UNITED STATES ANIMAL PROTECTION LAWS 2015 RANKINGS

- TOP TIER
- MIDDLE TIER
- BOTTOM TIER



2015 USA RANKINGS

BEST FIVE FOR ANIMALS	WORST FIVE FOR ANIMALS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Illinois 2. Oregon 3. Maine 4. California 5. Michigan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 46. North Dakota 47. Utah 48. Wyoming 49. Iowa 50. Kentucky

Top Tier	2015 Rank	Jurisdiction
	1	Illinois
	2	Oregon
	3	Maine
	4	California
	5	Michigan
	6	West Virginia
	7	Rhode Island
	8	Colorado
	9	New Jersey
	10	Massachusetts
	11	Arizona
	12	Delaware
	13	Washington
	14	Florida
	15	Indiana
	16	Kansas
	17	Oklahoma
	18	Louisiana
	19	Virginia

Middle Tier	2015 Rank	JURISDICTION
	20	Minnesota
	21	Nebraska
	22	Tennessee
	23	<i>District of Columbia</i>
	24	Nevada
	25	Vermont
	26	New Hampshire
	27	Ohio
	28	<i>Virgin Islands</i>
	29	Texas
	30	North Carolina
	31	Connecticut
	32	<i>Puerto Rico</i>
	33	Arkansas
	34	Missouri
	35	<i>Guam</i>
	36	South Carolina
	37	Georgia
38	Hawaii	

Bottom Tier	2015 Rank	JURISDICTION
	39	Alabama
	40	New York
	41	Montana
	42	Pennsylvania
	43	Mississippi
	44	Wisconsin
	45	South Dakota
	46	Maryland
	47	Idaho
	48	Alaska
	49	New Mexico
	50	North Dakota
	51	Utah
	52	Wyoming
	53	Iowa
	54	Kentucky
55	<i>American Samoa</i>	
56	<i>Northern Mariana Islands</i>	

EDITOR'S NOTE: The District of Columbia and U.S. territories are included in this report and are *italicized*. The "Best Five" and "Worst Five" lists are limited to states.

Table: “Best Five” States

Select Provisions	1. Illinois	2. Oregon	3. Maine	4. California	5. Michigan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Felony penalties available: Cruelty (C), Neglect (N), Fighting (F), Abandonment (A), Sexual Assault (S) 	C, N, F, A, S	C, F, N	C, N, F, A	C, N, F*	C, N, F, A, S
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adequate definitions/standards of basic care 	✓	✓	✓	--	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full range of statutory protections (cruelty, neglect, abandonment, sexual assault, fighting) 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased penalties for repeat abusers and/or animal hoarders 	✓	✓	✓	--	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased penalties when abuse is committed in the presence of a minor 	✓	✓	--	--	--
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Courts may order forfeiture of abused animals 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory forfeiture of animals upon conviction 	--	--	--	✓	--
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory reporting of suspected cruelty by veterinarians and/or select non-animal-related agencies/professionals 	✓	✓	✓	✓	--
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Police officers have an affirmative duty to enforce animal protection laws 	--	✓	✓	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Humane officers have broad law enforcement authority 	--	✓	--	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broad measures to mitigate and recover costs of care for abused pets seized by animal welfare agencies 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Court may restrict ownership of animals after a conviction 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental health evaluations and/or counseling for offenders 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Animals may be included in domestic violence protective orders 	✓	✓	✓	✓	--

*Limited to select species

Table: "Worst Five" States

Select Provisions	46. North Dakota**	47. Utah**	48. Wyoming	49. Iowa**	50. Kentucky
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Felony penalties available: Cruelty (C), Neglect (N), Fighting (F), Abandonment (A), Sexual Assault (S) 	C, F	C*, F*	C, F*	C*, F	C*, F*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adequate definitions/standards of basic care 	✓	✓	--	--	--
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full range of statutory protections (cruelty, neglect, abandonment, sexual assault, fighting) 	✓	✓	--	✓	--
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased penalties for repeat abusers and/or animal hoarders 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased penalties when abuse is committed in the presence of a minor 	--	--	--	--	--
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Courts may order forfeiture of abused animals 	✓	✓	✓	✓	--
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory forfeiture of animals upon conviction 	--	--	--	--	--
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory reporting of suspected cruelty by veterinarians and/or select non-animal-related agencies/professionals 	✓	--	--	--	†
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Police officers have an affirmative duty to enforce animal protection laws 	--	--	--	--	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Humane officers have broad law enforcement authority 	--	--	--	--	--
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broad measures to mitigate and recover costs of care for abused pets seized by animal welfare agencies 	✓	--	✓	✓	--
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Court may restrict ownership of animals after a conviction 	--	✓	✓	--	--
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental health evaluations and/or counseling for offenders 	--	✓	--	✓	--
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Animals may be included in domestic violence protective orders 	--	--	--	✓	--

*Limited to select species

**Ag gag state

† Veterinarians are prohibited from reporting suspected cruelty or fighting.

Overview: Why These States Made the “Best Five” List

STATE	Existing Strengths	Potential Improvements
1. Illinois	Felony penalties for cruelty, neglect, fighting, abandonment and sexual assault	More comprehensive definitions/standards of basic care
	Principal protections apply to most animals	Stronger felony provisions for neglect and abandonment
	Adequate definitions/standards of basic care	Increased penalties for offenders with prior domestic violence offenses
	Full range of statutory protections	Broader cost mitigation & recovery measures
	Increased penalties for repeat animal abusers and animal hoarders	Mandatory forfeiture of any type of animal upon conviction
	Mental health evaluations prior to sentencing	Mandatory restrictions on future ownership or possession of animals following a conviction
	Mandatory counseling / anger management for certain offenders	Broader law enforcement powers for humane agents and duty on peace officers to enforce animal protection laws
	Protective orders may include animals	Court-calendar priority when animals are in custody
	Some mandatory cost-recovery measures for impounded animals	Animal fighting as RICO predicate offense
	Pre-conviction forfeiture allowed	Animal abuser registry
	Court may order forfeiture of select animals on conviction	
	Court may order restrictions on future ownership or possession of animals upon conviction	
	Mandatory reporting of suspected animal cruelty by select non-animal-related agencies and veterinarians	
Humane agents have some law enforcement authority		
2. Oregon	Felony penalties for cruelty, neglect, and fighting	Felony penalties for abandonment and sexual assault
	Adequate definitions/standards of basic care	Mandatory terms of incarceration for certain offenders
	Principal protections apply to most animals	Broader pre-sentence mental health evaluations
	Full range of statutory protections	Mandatory restitution
	Increased penalties for repeat animal abusers	Mandatory cost mitigation & recovery measures for impounded animals
	Increased penalties for repeat domestic violence offenders	Mandatory forfeiture on conviction
	Increased penalties when abuse committed in the presence of a minor	Mandatory reporting of suspected animal cruelty by select non-animal-related agencies
	Increased penalties for cases involving multiple animals	Mandatory reporting of all suspected animal cruelty by veterinarians

STATE	Existing Strengths	Potential Improvements
2. Oregon <i>Continued</i>	Limited pre-sentence mental health evaluations	Court-calendar priority when animals are in custody
	Permissive court order for counseling / anger management	Animal abuser registry
	Protective orders may include animals	
	Court may order cost mitigation & recovery measures for impounded animals	
	Pre-conviction forfeiture allowed	
	Court may order forfeiture of animals on conviction	
	Mandatory restrictions on future ownership or possession of animals upon conviction	
	Mandatory reporting of suspected aggravated animal cruelty by veterinarians	
	Peace officers have an affirmative duty to enforce animal protection laws	
	Humane agents have broad law enforcement authority	
	Animal fighting is a predicate offense under state RICO laws	
	Strong animal fighting provision	
	3. Maine	
Principal protections apply to most animals		Increased penalties for crimes involving multiple animals
Adequate definitions/standards of basic care		Increased penalties for offenders with prior domestic violence offenses
Full range of statutory protections		Increased penalties when abuse is committed in the presence of a minor
Increased penalties for repeat animal abusers		Mandatory restitution
Limited pre-sentence mental health evaluations		Mandatory cost mitigation & recovery measures for impounded animals
Permissive court order for counseling / anger management		Mandatory forfeiture of an animal upon conviction
Protective orders may include animals		Mandatory restrictions on future ownership or possession of animals following a conviction
Court may order cost recovery measures on conviction		Mandatory reporting of suspected animal cruelty by select non-animal-related agencies
Pre-conviction forfeiture allowed		Mandatory reporting of all suspected animal cruelty by veterinarians
Court may order forfeiture on conviction		Broader law enforcement powers for humane agents
Court may order restrictions on future ownership or possession of animals upon conviction		Court-calendar priority when animals are in custody
Permissive reporting of animal cruelty by select non-animal related agencies		Felony penalty on first-offense sexual assault
Mandatory reporting of suspected aggravated animal cruelty by veterinarians		Stronger animal fighting provisions

STATE	Existing Strengths	Potential Improvements
3. Maine <i>continued</i>	Peace officers have an affirmative duty to investigate animal protection law violations	Animal fighting as RICO predicate offense
	Humane agents have some law enforcement authority	Animal abuser registry
4. California	Felony penalties for cruelty, neglect and fighting	Felony penalties for abandonment and sexual assault
	Principal protections apply to most animals	Better statutory definitions/standards of basic care
	Full range of statutory protections	Increased penalties for cases involving multiple animals or repeat offenses
	Mandatory court order for counseling / anger management	Increased penalties when abuse committed in the presence of a minor
	Protective orders may include animals	Increased penalties for offenders with prior domestic violence offenses
	Court must order restitution	Mandatory terms of incarceration for certain offenders
	Mandatory cost mitigation & recovery measures for impounded animals	Pre-sentence mental health evaluations
	Pre-conviction forfeiture allowed	Mandatory post-conviction ownership and possession ban
	Mandatory forfeiture of animals on conviction	Stronger animal fighting provisions
	Permissive post-conviction ownership and possession ban	Mandatory reporting of suspected animal cruelty by select non-animal-related agencies
	Select non-animal-related agencies may report suspected animal cruelty	Court-calendar priority when animals are in custody
	Mandatory reporting of animal cruelty by veterinarians	Animal fighting as RICO predicate offense
	Peace officers have an affirmative duty to enforce animal protection laws	Animal abuser registry
Humane agents have broad law enforcement authority		
5. Michigan	Felony penalties for cruelty, neglect, fighting, abandonment and sexual assault	Increased penalties for offenders with prior domestic violence offenses
	Adequate definitions/standards of basic care	Increased penalties when abuse committed in the presence of a minor
	Principal protections apply to most animals	Mandatory terms of incarceration
	Full range of statutory protections	Protective orders to include animals
	Increased penalties for repeat animal abusers	Mandatory restitution
	Increased penalties for cases involving multiple animals	Mandatory cost mitigation measures for impounded animals
	Pre-sentence mental health evaluations	Mandatory forfeiture of animals on conviction
	Permissive court order for counseling / anger management	Mandatory restrictions on future ownership or possession of animals following a conviction
	Permissive cost mitigation measures for impounded animals	Mandatory reporting of suspected animal cruelty by select non-animal-related agencies and veterinarians
	Pre-conviction forfeiture allowed	Court-calendar priority when animals are in custody

STATE	Existing Strengths	Potential Improvements
5. Michigan <i>continued</i>	Court may order forfeiture on conviction	Animal abuser registry
	Court may order restrictions on future ownership or possession of animals upon conviction	
	Peace officers have an affirmative duty to enforce animal protection laws	
	Humane agents have broad law enforcement authority	
	Strong animal fighting provisions	
	Animal fighting as RICO predicate offense	

Overview: Why These States Made the “Worst Five” List

STATE	Major Areas Needing Improvement
46. North Dakota	Ag gag law
	No felony neglect or abandonment provisions
	No increased penalties when abuse is committed in the presence of a minor or involves multiple animals
	No mental health evaluations or counseling for offenders
	No statutory authority to allow protective orders to include animals
	No mandatory forfeiture of animals upon conviction
	No restrictions on future possession of animals following a conviction
	No provisions for select non-animal-related agencies/professionals to report suspected animal abuse
	No duty for peace officers to enforce animal protection laws
	Humane officers lack broad law enforcement authority
	Inadequate sexual assault provisions
47. Utah	Ag gag law
	Felony provisions available only for cruelty against select animals
	No felony provisions for neglect, abandonment, or fighting of animals
	No increased penalties when abuse is committed in the presence of a minor or involves multiple animals
	No statutory authority to allow protective orders to include animals
	No duty for peace officers to enforce animal protection laws
	Inadequate cost mitigation & recovery provisions for impounded animals
	No provisions for select non-animal-related agencies/professionals to report suspected animal abuse
	No mandatory forfeiture of animals upon conviction
	Inadequate sexual assault provisions

STATE	Major Areas Needing Improvement
48. Wyoming	Felony provisions available only for cruelty and fighting against select animals
	No felony neglect or abandonment provisions
	Inadequate definitions/standards of basic care
	No increased penalties when abuse is committed in the presence of a minor
	No mental health evaluations or counseling for offenders
	No statutory authority to allow protective orders to include animals
	No mandatory forfeiture of animals upon conviction
	No provisions for veterinarians or other select non-animal-related agencies/professionals to report suspected animal abuse
	No duty for peace officers to enforce animal protection laws
	Humane officers lack broad law enforcement authority
	No provisions for sexual assault
	Inadequate animal fighting provisions
49. Iowa	Ag gag law
	Felony provisions available only for cruelty against select animals and fighting
	No felony neglect or abandonment provisions
	Inadequate definitions/standards of basic care
	No increased penalties when abuse is committed in the presence of a minor or involves multiple animals
	No mandatory forfeiture of animals upon conviction
	No restrictions on future ownership or possession of animals following a conviction
	No provisions for veterinarians or other select non-animal-related agencies/professionals to report suspected animal abuse
	No duty for peace officers to enforce animal protection laws
	Humane officers lack broad law enforcement authority

STATE	Major Areas Needing Improvement
50. Kentucky	Felony provisions available only for cruelty and fighting, both against only select animals
	No felony provisions for neglect or abandonment
	Inadequate definitions/standards of basic care
	No increased penalties when abuse is committed in the presence of a minor or involves multiple animals
	No mental health evaluations or counseling for offenders
	No statutory authority to allow protective orders to include animals
	No cost mitigation or recovery provisions for impounded animals
	No court-ordered forfeiture provisions
	No restrictions on future ownership or possession of animals following a conviction
	No provisions for select non-animal-related agencies/professionals to report suspected animal abuse
	Veterinarians are prohibited from reporting suspected cruelty or fighting
	Humane officers lack broad law enforcement authority
	No provisions for sexual assault
Inadequate animal fighting provisions	

Methodology summary

The 56 jurisdictions included in the 2015 U.S. ANIMAL PROTECTION LAWS RANKINGS REPORT were numerically ranked based on their cumulative scores to 44 study questions covering 15 distinct animal protection laws categories. The report analyzed enacted laws only and did not review the separate issue of how these laws are enforced. Answers to the study questions were based primarily on the statutory data contained in the 4,000+ page compendium ANIMAL PROTECTION LAWS OF THE USA & CANADA (TENTH EDITION).^{*} The study questions were close-ended and the choices exhaustive and mutually exclusive. The questions were limited to the following categories:

1. General prohibitions
2. Penalties
3. Exemptions
4. Mental health evaluations & counseling
5. Protective orders
6. Cost mitigation & recovery
7. Seizure/impoundment
8. Forfeiture and post-conviction possession
9. Non-animal agency reporting of suspected animal cruelty
10. Veterinarian reporting of suspected animal cruelty
11. Law enforcement policies
12. Sexual assault
13. Fighting
14. Offender registration
15. "Ag gag" legislation

^{*}Please visit aldf.org for the ANIMAL PROTECTION LAWS OF THE USA & CANADA (TENTH EDITION). Contact comms@aldf.org for any report-related questions, comments, or additional information.