



2017 U.S. Animal Protection Laws Rankings™

Comparing Overall Strength & Comprehensiveness

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2017 U.S. ANIMAL PROTECTION LAWS RANKINGS™

Animal Legal Defense Fund Annual Study Ranks Laws Across the Country

*Pennsylvania is Most-Improved State with new comprehensive animal cruelty laws
Trends include new immunity for removing animal from a vehicle and bestiality laws*

January 2018

The Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) announces the publication of the 2017 U.S. ANIMAL PROTECTION LAWS RANKINGS REPORT, ALDF's twelfth 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.

Pennsylvania was the most-improved state in 2017, jumping twenty places in rank, in part, by passing a new felony provision for first-time offenders of aggravated animal cruelty, such as torturing an animal; strengthening its animal fighting laws; and adding civil immunity for veterinarians who report suspected animal abuse.

"Perpetrators of the most unthinkable violence against animals deserve more than a slap on the wrist, and now prosecutors in Pennsylvania have more important tools they need to tackle these horrific cases," says Lora Dunn, Director and Senior Staff Attorney for the Animal Legal Defense Fund's Criminal Justice Program. "Sadly, many cruelty cases go undetected, hidden from public view, and veterinarians might be the only witnesses to these animals' suffering. That's why it's so important to empower veterinarians who suspect animal cruelty to take action without fear of legal retribution by the abuser—just as Pennsylvania has done with this new immunity provision."

Nevada also made significant progress this year, jumping 16 places in rank, in part, by passing a comprehensive bestiality law. Ohio, New Hampshire, Texas, and Vermont also passed bestiality laws, with Texas making bestiality a registerable sex offense.

The 2017 RANKINGS REPORT also highlights legislation granting civil immunity for removing animals from hot vehicles. Arizona, California (contributing to its rise in rank, from fourth to third place),

¹ See page 20 of the report for a summary of the methodology used.

Colorado, Indiana, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Oregon all enacted these “reckless endangerment” provisions this year. More than twenty-five states now have some type of “hot cars” laws on the books.

“For many, it would be unconscionable to see an animal in distress and fail to act,” says Kathleen Wood, the Animal Legal Defense Fund’s Criminal Justice Program Fellow. “Immunity laws ensure that those who rescue animals from vehicles in certain emergency situations are not bombarded with lawsuits in response to their heroic actions.”

Other notable changes this year included Alaska’s new law to protect pets from domestic violence; Connecticut’s increased penalties for subsequent aggravated animal abuse; Delaware’s prohibition on breed-specific legislation; Kansas’s mandatory forfeiture of animals upon conviction; Kentucky’s new protection for service animals, which includes felony provisions and allows the court to order restitution, as well as Kentucky’s new forfeiture provisions for abuse of an equine; Maryland’s mandatory reporting and civil immunity for veterinarians who suspect animal abuse; Missouri’s increased penalties for various cruelty offenses; Rhode Island’s new hoarding prohibition; and statewide anti-tethering laws in Massachusetts, Vermont, and Washington.

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

- ✓ **30%** of jurisdictions improved 2-10%
- ✓ **48%** 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:

- **Eleven 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, Pennsylvania**, *South Dakota, and Utah*.
- **Thirteen jurisdictions** strengthened their existing felony animal cruelty laws: *Connecticut**, *Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, Nevada, Ohio, Puerto Rico, and Rhode Island, Texas**, *Vermont**.
- **Seventeen jurisdictions** added felonies for repeated or aggravated animal neglect: *Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania**, *Puerto Rico, Rhode Island and Tennessee*.
- **Nine 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, Pennsylvania**, *and Puerto Rico*.
- **Seven jurisdictions** added felonies for the sexual assault of an animal: *Alaska, New Jersey, Nevada**, *Oregon, Puerto Rico, Tennessee, and Texas**.
- **Twenty-two 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: *Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware**, *Florida, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, 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 these jurisdictions, and to garner support for strengthening and enforcing animal protection laws throughout the country.

**denotes new changes in 2017*

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.



UNITED STATES ANIMAL PROTECTION LAWS 2017 RANKINGS

- TOP TIER
- MIDDLE TIER
- BOTTOM TIER



2017 USA RANKINGS

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

	2017 Rank	Jurisdiction
Top Tier	1	Illinois
	2	Oregon
	3	California
	4	Maine
	5	Rhode Island
	6	Michigan
	7	West Virginia
	8	Nevada
	9	New Jersey
	10	Colorado
	11	Arizona
	12	Washington
	13	New Hampshire
	14	Massachusetts
	15	Delaware
	16	Florida
	17	Tennessee
	18	Indiana
	19	Kansas

Middle Tier	2017 Rank	JURISDICTION
	20	Oklahoma
	21	Louisiana
	22	Minnesota
	23	Virginia
	24	Pennsylvania
	25	Nebraska
	26	Vermont
	27	Ohio
	28	<i>District of Columbia</i>
	29	Texas
	30	<i>Virgin Islands</i>
	31	Wisconsin
	32	Connecticut
	33	Missouri
	34	Georgia
	35	<i>Puerto Rico</i>
	36	North Carolina
	37	Arkansas
38	<i>Guam</i>	

Bottom Tier	2017 Rank	JURISDICTION
	39	South Carolina
	40	Hawaii
	41	Alabama
	42	New York
	43	Montana
	44	Mississippi
	45	South Dakota
	46	Idaho
	47	Maryland
	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. California	4. Maine	5. Rhode Island
<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, S	C, N, F*	C, N, F, A	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
	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. California	
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		

STATE	Existing Strengths	Potential Improvements
4. Maine	Felony penalties for cruelty, neglect, fighting, and abandonment	Stronger felony provisions for neglect
	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
5. Rhode Island	Felony penalties for cruelty, neglect, abandonment, sexual assault and fighting	Increased penalties for cases involving multiple animals or repeat offenses
	Principal protections apply to most animals	Increased penalties when abuse committed in the presence of a minor
	Full range of statutory protections	Mandatory mental health evaluation and or counseling
	Mandatory forfeiture of animals upon conviction	Include pets in protective orders
	Peace officers have an affirmative duty to enforce animal protection laws	Permissive of costs of care pre-conviction
	Humane agents have broad law enforcement authority	Mandatory seizure of abused animals
	Permissive post-conviction ownership and possession ban	Mandatory post-conviction ownership and possession ban
	Mandatory restitution	Mandatory reporting of animal cruelty by veterinarians
	Permissive court order for counseling / anger management	Court-calendar priority when animals are in custody

STATE	Extra Strengths	Potential Improvements
5. Rhode Island <i>continued</i>	Mandatory post-conviction cost of care	Animal fighting as RICO predicate offense
	Prohibits breed-specific legislation	Animal abuser registry
	Mandatory incarceration and fines available	

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 statutory authority to allow protective orders to include 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 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 2017 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 (TWELFTH 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 (TWELFTH EDITION). Contact comms@aldf.org for any report-related questions, comments, or additional information.