



# **ANIMAL LEGAL DEFENSE FUND** EST 1979

## **COMPANION ANIMAL LAW Cover Memo to Course Guide**

There are several reasons it is appropriate to add a course focusing on companion animal law to the law school curriculum. The course can either supplement an animal law survey course or be part of a series of animal law courses.

First, from a practical perspective, issues relating to companion animals are the concerns most likely to arise for students entering the general practice of law. The reality is only a small percentage of students interested in animal law issues will be able to obtain a job with an organization focusing on animal issues. However, many students will become associates at firms or otherwise and having a background in these topics can enable these new lawyers to establish a reputation for expertise in a practice area quickly.

It is increasingly important for attorneys to understand issues relating specifically to companion animals. Twenty-seven percent of respondents in a 2014 survey of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers noticed an increase in disputes over pet custody in the previous five years. Attorneys working as criminal prosecutors or as defense counsel may be assigned animal cruelty cases. In 2015 the Commonwealth of Virginia's Office of the Attorney General created the national first state attorney general's Animal Law unit.

A tort law practice could include veterinary malpractice as well as dangerous dog litigation. A practice in civil rights law could include Fourth Amendment/Section 1983 issues relating to the seizure of animals or may require an attorney to be conversant with the laws providing rights for persons utilizing service or assistance animals.

Second, companion animal issues are particularly well suited to begin the process of reviewing subjects that are on the bar examination such as torts, contracts and criminal law. Essentially a companion animal course can reinforce basic concepts (such as elements of negligence cause of action) using material of interest to the students.

Third, providing for a companion animal law course allows for a separate course to be offered focusing on wildlife or farmed animal issues. It may be that a law school faculty member with

expertise in environmental law, natural resource law, agricultural law or food law is ideally suited to teach such a course.

With two course books on Animal Law available, and the supplemental information available from the Animal Legal Defense Fund, the challenge for instructors is not whether there is sufficient material to support a companion animal law course—it is which topics won't be able to be covered given time constraints.

~Rebecca J. Huss