

VETERINARIANS' ROLE IN ANIMAL CRUELTY ENFORCEMENT

AN OATH TO PROTECT

“Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health **and welfare**, the **prevention and** relief of animal suffering, the conservation of animal resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge.”

This excerpt from the veterinarian’s oath was amended in 2010 with the addition of the verbiage in bold, solidifying the role of veterinary medicine in recognizing and responding to cruelty to animals.



“ In partnership with the Animal Legal Defense Fund, I work with veterinarians across the county who are responding to animal cruelty investigations, some for the first time, by doing exams or writing reports and caring for the victim animals. Without the expertise of a veterinarian there would be a lot more suffering and in some cases no one held accountable for a criminal act. The bottom line is that a veterinarian’s insight and expertise can give voice to the animal victim that is otherwise silenced.”

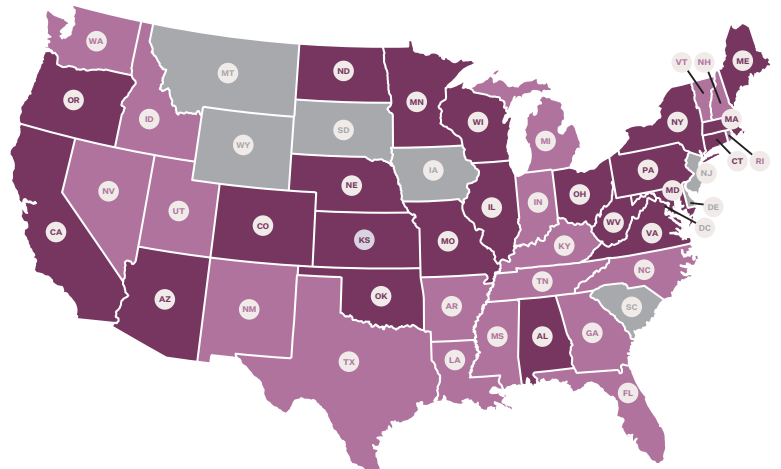
Kris Otteman, DVM, *Diplomate ABVP Shelter Medicine Practice, CAWA*

A RESPONSIBILITY TO RECOGNIZE

Ample research supports the finding that there is a direct link between acts of cruelty to animals and violence toward people, and animals are often used as tools to coerce and control human victims of familial violence. By recognizing and responding to animal abuse, veterinarians play a critical role in preventing domestic violence and child abuse.

A DUTY TO REPORT

In many cases, veterinarians may be the only witness to animal abuse, and they are uniquely qualified to identify the signs of cruelty. As of 2025, 23 states and 2 territories require veterinarians to report suspected animal cruelty, and most of those states also grant civil immunity to veterinarians who report.



VETERINARY REPORTING OF ANIMAL CRUELTY

- REQUIRED
- PERMIT AND/OR GRANT IMMUNITY
- NO REPORTING LAW

A RESOURCE FOR VETERINARY PROFESSIONALS

The Animal Legal Defense Fund offers support and resources for veterinarians who contribute their time and expertise to animal cruelty and abuse investigations, including:

- Real-time case consultation and review
- Customizable forms and templates for use in investigations
- Training for veterinarians, animal shelters, law enforcement, and prosecutors
- Case support grants for veterinary forensics, cost of care, medical treatment
- Expert witness resources and funding
- Report writing and trial preparation support

OTHER PUBLICATIONS AND ANIMAL LEGAL DEFENSE FUND RESOURCES:

U.S. Animal Protection Laws Rankings Report



The Best and Worst States for Animal Protection Laws

Available at aldf.org/rankings

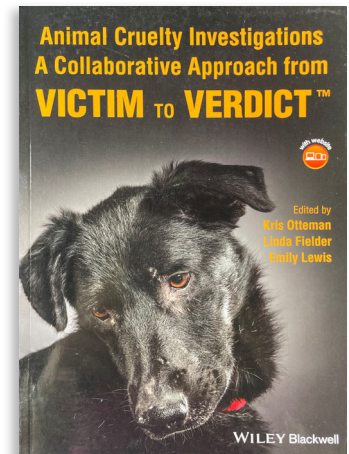
Factsheet: The Link



There is an established link between cruelty to animals and violence toward humans

Available at aldf.org/thelink

Comprehensive Guidebook: Victim to Verdict



A framework for the experts who respond to animal cruelty cases

Available on Amazon

Sign up to hear about training and additional opportunities for veterinarians at aldf.org/vetsignup.



Or scan with your smartphone's camera



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ANIMAL LEGAL DEFENSE FUND

“The Animal Legal Defense Fund is a fantastic resource for veterinarians working on cruelty cases. I have personally reached out and received invaluable advice from their knowledgeable staff on how to build a more effective case.”

Susan Norris, DVM, Champaign, IL