

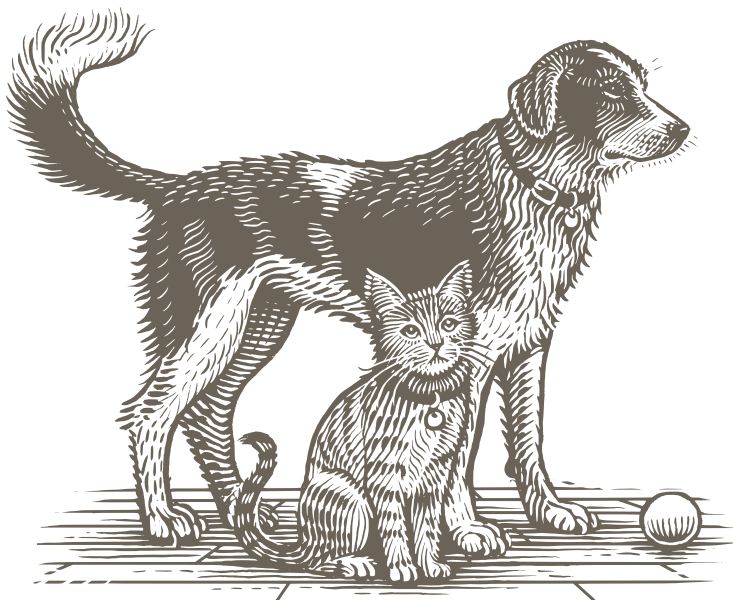


The Animals' Advocate

FEATURE

HOW WELL DO YOUR STATE'S LAWS PROTECT ANIMALS?

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ALDF Campaign Manager Matt Rossell with Princess Buttercup, a puppy he rescued in his personal capacity as a Good Samaritan from an unattended vehicle. Multiple states passed new laws protecting companion animals in hot cars last year; [learn more on page 5.](#)



Dear Fellow Animal Advocate,

People who fight for animals, like you and me, know that the work of protecting them can feel long and daunting. There are moments when a bill doesn't pass, when a court rules the wrong way, or when an animal cruelty victim tragically doesn't make it.

We've all experienced hard times in this movement — so right now, **I want to make sure that you can celebrate the progress you've made possible.**

Our annual U.S. Animal Protection Laws Rankings Report provides a unique vantage point for marking this progress. When I reflect on the latest edition of the report (now in its 20th year!), I'm struck by just how far we've come.

Historically speaking, 20 years wasn't all that long ago. But in that time, together, we've doubled the number of U.S. states and territories where judges can ban convicted animal abusers from owning or possessing other animals — a commonsense measure that makes a world of difference in preventing future cruelty.

And in those past two decades, we've made huge strides in protecting both human and animal victims of domestic violence — going from **zero** states or territories that statutorily allowed animals to be included in protective orders against their guardians' abusers, to now **nearly all of them doing so.** (Learn more about the remarkable progress you've helped make possible on [page 6.](#))

This is a moment to marvel at how far we've come, and redouble our efforts to protect animals under the law. I'm proud to stand beside you in this fight!



For the Animals,

Chris Green
Executive Director

P.S. With your support, ALDF will help chart the course forward in our upcoming **Animal Law Symposium** on May 7 and 8. In this free online event, we'll explore the latest on protecting animals through transparency, engagement, and regulatory practice. I hope you can join us! Register at aldf.org/2026symposium.

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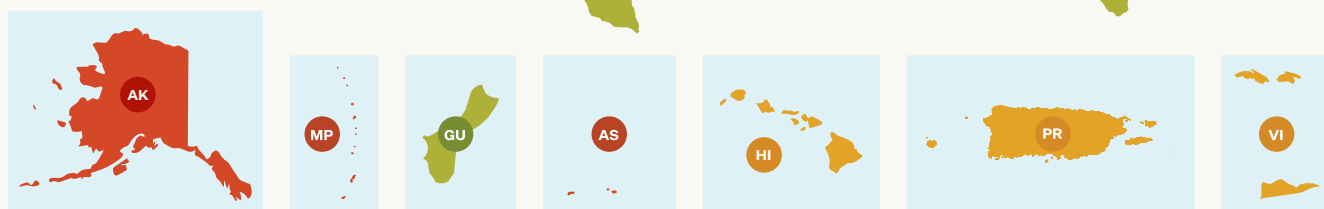
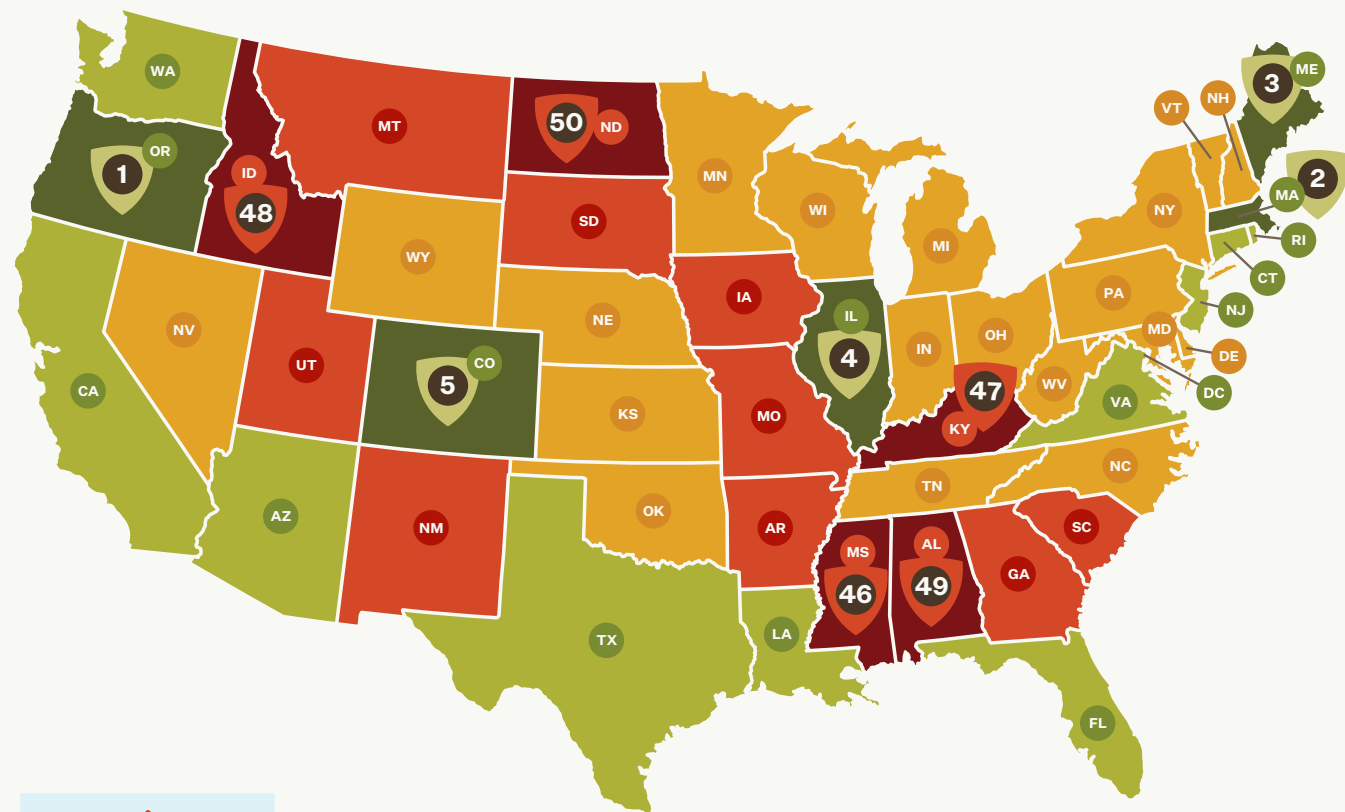


How Well Do Your State's Laws Protect Animals?

Find out how every state and territory stacks up in ALDF's latest U.S. Animal Protection Laws Rankings Report.

Do you know where your state or territory stands on animal cruelty?

For the 20th straight year, ALDF is making sure that animal advocates and lawmakers are able to find out — and equipped to take action based on what they learn.



RANKINGS BEST (1) TO WORST (50):



This year's report finds some exciting new trends in animal protection law, with familiar states coming in first and last. Oregon holds the top spot for the third year in a row, while North Dakota once again ranks 50th.

With your support, ALDF not only supports pro-animal legislation and files lawsuits to ensure that animal protection laws are enforced — we also track the progress of laws affecting animals

over time and throughout the country, and this information can then be used to support the call for even stronger laws. Every year, our attorneys review more than 3,600 pages of animal protection statutes and use over 4,300 data points to determine the rankings.

Learn more about the rankings, find an interactive map where you can discover more detail about each state and territory's animal laws and opportunities to take action, and read the full report (including additional 2025 victories for animals) at aldf.org/rankings.

TOP FIVE STATES

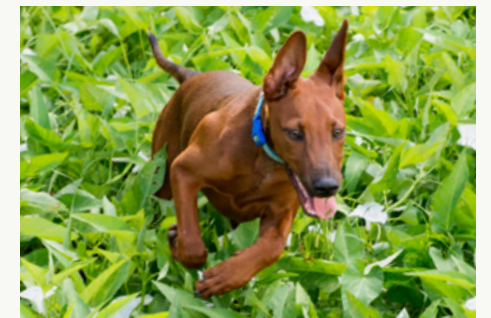
- 1 OREGON
- 2 MASSACHUSETTS
- 3 MAINE
- 4 ILLINOIS
- 5 COLORADO

BOTTOM FIVE STATES

- 46 MISSISSIPPI
- 47 KENTUCKY
- 48 IDAHO
- 49 ALABAMA
- 50 NORTH DAKOTA

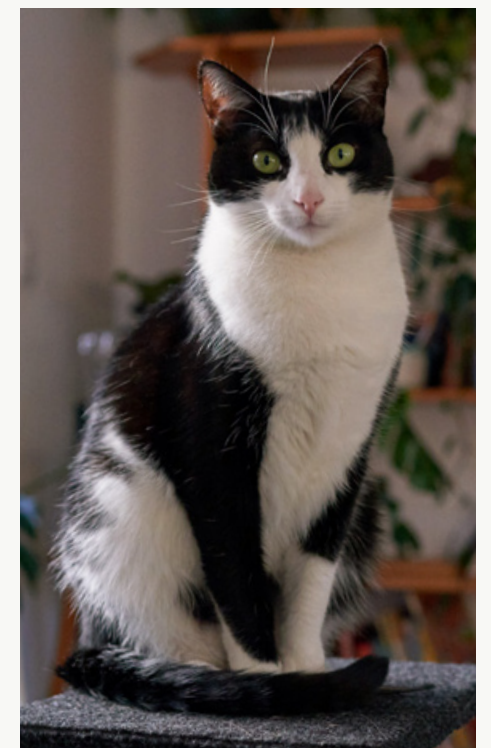
MOST IMPROVED STATES

NEVADA (rising from 31st to 26th place) and TENNESSEE (rising from 23rd to 19th place), both in part on the strength of newly enacted laws involving psychological examinations and treatment for people convicted of animal cruelty.



DID YOU KNOW?

The Rankings Report not only catalogs the changes in animal protection laws — it also inspires them. For instance, lawmakers in Guam, upon learning of the territory's low rank in a previous edition of the report, felt driven to overhaul Guam's then-outdated animal cruelty law. As a result, Guam rose in the ranks and is today the top-ranked U.S. territory.



ANIMAL LAW TREND: CAT DECLAWING BANS

Among the major trends cited in the Rankings Report is the passage of declawing bans — an effort that saw great momentum last year.

You were at the forefront.

With your support, ALDF was instrumental in advocating for declawing bans in California, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island — doubling the number of U.S. states to have banned the practice. (Declawing bans make an exception for the rare cases in which a cat’s claws must be removed for legitimate veterinary purposes, such as in the treatment of cancer in a cat’s nail bed.)

Many well-meaning cat guardians mistakenly believe that declawing is a simple and humane procedure. In reality, it’s akin to removing a human’s fingers at the last knuckle.

We’re currently hard at work supporting similar bills in multiple other states. Learn more at aldf.org/protectpaws.



ANIMAL LAW TREND: EMERGENCY RESCUE & RELIEF FOR ANIMALS

Another significant trend is the passage in several states of new laws that protect animals in emergency situations. For example, a new Arkansas law enables law enforcement officers to take immediate action to seize possession of a dog or cat in danger “if a substantial likelihood exists that the condition of the dog or cat would deteriorate if the dog or cat was not secured.” Meanwhile, both Nevada and Washington state enacted new laws allowing members of the public to take action when a dog or other companion animal is trapped in a hot car (as long as they take certain reasonable measures before breaking the car window).

Astonishingly, not every state yet allows good Samaritans to rescue dogs from hot cars, but with your help, ALDF is working to change this. Find out where your state stands on this issue at aldf.org/hotcars.



20 YEARS OF PROGRESS FOR ANIMALS

Animal protection work can feel slow. In statehouses and courtrooms, animals can seem to take a backseat to human-focused work. But the 20-year arc of our Rankings Report tells another story.

When we launched this report, the legal landscape was very different for animals and the people who love them. For example, in 2005 — the year covered in our inaugural 2006 report — **not a single U.S. state** explicitly allowed by statute a domestic violence victim’s animals to be included in a protective order (also known as a restraining order) against the abuser. As of 2025, **42 states and two territories do** — a jump from 0% to 78.6%. This makes all the difference for human and animal victims alike; abusers all too often harm or threaten their chosen victim’s beloved animal as a way of tormenting and controlling them.

In 2005, just 22 states and one territory allowed judges to ban animal cruelty offenders from owning or possessing other animals. By 2025, that number had grown to 42 states and four territories — a jump of more than 40%.

Twenty years ago, just 21 states and one territory required or even explicitly *allowed* veterinarians to report suspected cruelty to their animal patients. As of last year, 44 states and two territories now do.

And in 2005, 18 states and four territories **had not yet criminalized the sexual abuse of animals**. By 2025, that number had shrunk to one state and two territories.

There’s still much work to be done to protect animals under the law — but the progress we’ve made together is immense and worth celebrating. We’re proud to stand beside you in this fight.

VICTORY: ALDF CASE RESULTS IN TEXAS LAW BEING RULED UNCONSTITUTIONAL

When Texas passed a law that illegally censored plant-based meat producers, you were there to ensure that ALDF could sue to stop it.

Now, thanks to that case, the Texas law has been ruled unconstitutional and unenforceable by a federal court because it violates the First Amendment.

This victory helps ensure a level playing field for animal-friendly companies, protects free speech, and preserves the ability of plant-based consumers to access the foods of their choice. And this makes all the difference for animals suffering on factory farms — because laws like Texas’s are designed to benefit the animal agriculture industry at the expense of its animal-friendly competitors.

This type of law relies on the false suggestion that consumers are somehow “confused” when they buy plant-based products. In reality, consumers are choosing these products specifically because they don’t contain animals.

“The thing is, no one thinks *Tofurky* comes from slaughtered turkeys. It’s an imaginary problem, it flies in the face of free speech, and it harms animals in the process.”



ALDF Staff Attorney Michael Swistara

How did Texas’s law hurt plant-based companies? It was “designed to handicap plant-based meat producers by requiring additional burdensome — but vague — disclosures, even though Texas conceded it was not aware of a single consumer being confused,” says Swistara. “The Texas law provides no clear guidance for how to ‘correctly’ label foods, and would burden plant-based food producers with crushing re-labeling costs when there’s no way to confirm new labels would meet the law’s unclear guidance. So we took Texas to court.”



Free speech and animal protection are closely intertwined, which is why ALDF fights so hard to protect the First Amendment rights of plant-based food companies, whistleblowers from inhumane industries, journalists who cover animal issues, and more. This isn’t the first time ALDF has taken on state laws that censored plant-based companies — and won. In this case, we were joined by The Good Food Institute, representing plaintiffs Tofurky and the Plant Based Foods Association.

This work is important not only for the individual cases we take on, but also for the message it sends. “We hope that this case, as with others ALDF has brought, will discourage states from passing unconstitutional and protectionist laws that simply serve to waste taxpayer dollars and stifle competition,” says Staff Attorney Michael Swistara, ALDF’s lead attorney on the case. “And we will keep fighting for a fair market, consumer choice, and free speech wherever these issues impact animals too.”



WHAT LEGACY WILL YOU LEAVE FOR ANIMALS?

For generations to come, animals will need strong legal advocates to protect them from cruelty and neglect. By including the Animal Legal Defense Fund in your will or trust, you can help ensure that this lifesaving work continues far into the future.

A legacy gift is a powerful way to stand up for animals — one that may cost nothing today, yet creates lasting impact. Whether large or small, your gift will help drive critical legal victories, strengthen protections, and give animals a voice in the legal system.

When you include the Animal Legal Defense Fund in your plans, you’ll be welcomed into our **Justice Legacy Society** — a community of compassionate supporters committed to a more just future for animals.

Making a gift is simple. You can use the following information:

Animal Legal Defense Fund
P.O. Box 96041
Washington, D.C. 20090

Tax ID: 94-2681680

If you’d like to explore your options or have questions, we’re here to help. Please contact us at estates@aldf.org or call **707-795-2533 x1034**.

Already included the Animal Legal Defense Fund in your plans? We would be honored to hear from you: aldf.org/shareyourlegacy.



Your legacy can protect animals like Rocco for years to come. Credit: Beth Lilly Redwood / Lighthouse Farm Sanctuary.

BORN IN CRUELTY. REMEMBERED IN LOVE.

How one family is honoring Cielo by fighting to end puppy mills.

When Kitty Kessler's beloved dog Cielo passed away in October, she knew exactly how she wanted to honor her — with a gift to the Animal Legal Defense Fund to help end the cruel practice of puppy and kitten mills.

Cielo, a Chihuahua, was born in a puppy mill. For the first eight to 10 years of her life, she was used solely as a breeder. She lived in a small wire cage exposed to the elements, kept continuously pregnant, and her puppies were taken from her and sold as quickly as possible.

Once a puppy mill dog is considered “spent,” they are often discarded without hesitation. When one of Cielo's litters was deemed “unsaleable,” she was thrown from a moving car onto a busy Florida highway. A good Samaritan spotted her and contacted animal control. At Miami Animal Services, her life began to change.



Cielo at the Kesslers' home.

Mel and Kitty Kessler weren't looking to expand their family — but sometimes love finds you. Kitty named her Cielo, meaning “Heaven.” It marked the beginning of her long road to healing from serious leg injuries and, heartbreakingly, vocal cords that had been severed to silence her barking.

Over time, Cielo formed an especially deep bond with Mel. When he became ill, she rarely left his side, offering quiet comfort through his final days. Kitty takes comfort in believing they are together once again.

The Kessler family has generously supported ALDF for years, and Kitty and her children's gift in Cielo's memory will advance state retail pet sale bans and strategic litigation to shut down abusive breeding operations. This work is complex, and often slow — but it creates lasting change.

Cielo's life began in unimaginable cruelty. But it ended in love. And through the Kessler family's generosity, her legacy helps build a future where no animal is treated as a product, and every life is protected by law.

Join the Kessler family in powering the work for animals like Cielo at aldf.org/support.

VICTORY: JUSTICE FOR CATS HARMED BY FLORIDA KITTEN MILL

Dogs like Cielo (see previous page) aren't the only animals who suffer in inhumane commercial breeding mills. Countless kittens and others also face mistreatment in mills that churn them out for profit. You recently helped achieve an important victory over one such facility: Florida-based kitten mill Adorable Stars.

We filed a lawsuit after learning of numerous kittens who'd been harmed or even died due to the mill's actions. Kittens sold by Adorable Stars faced health issues ranging from Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP) and Panleukopenia (feline distemper) to congenital heart issues, chronic breathing problems, bone conditions, infectious anemia, and more. Some arrived at their new homes with severe parasite infestations. The mill sold these kittens with false health assurances, and multiple families were left heartbroken and financially devastated by vet bills.

Clearly, these kittens and their families needed a champion — **and you stepped up.**

In response to our motion for summary judgment, the court found that the defendants had breached their contracts by selling kittens they *knew* to be sick. The court also held that the defendants:

- breached warranties to our plaintiffs;
- misled our plaintiffs and engaged in deceptive practices;
- violated Florida's “pet lemon law” (which, among other things, prohibits animal dealers from misrepresenting the health of an animal);
- were negligent; and
- engaged in civil fraud.

That's a lot of victories on our legal claims — but our case continues as we work to resolve even *more* claims to protect more kittens from facing the same fate. We're joined in this effort by ALDF Pro Bono Network member White & Case.



ALDF Litigation Fellow Zachary Handler and Staff Attorney Morgan Boutilier at the courthouse.

IN COURT: ALDF Takes On Alleged Interstate Puppy-Mill Scheme

ALDF was recently back in the courtroom fighting for victimized dogs and their families in our “puppy laundering” case, *Carey v. JAKS Puppies*. In this lawsuit, we're taking on a network that we believe tried to evade California law by falsely presenting mill-bred puppies as “rescues” to be sold for high prices in California pet stores. Numerous puppies became sickened or died in transit from the Midwest puppy mill dealer to the California pet stores. Notably, the case employs the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, more commonly known as RICO — an innovative use of a law that was originally used to prosecute the Mafia. We're joined in the case by Smith & Lowney PLLC.



BIG CATS NEED OUR HELP

ALDF supporters like you were instrumental in passing the Big Cat Public Safety Act, a federal law that protects both animals and the public by outlawing the private ownership of big cats, as well as banning cruel “cub petting” encounters that were previously a major moneymaker for roadside zoos.

Since this legislation was signed into law in 2022, **it has protected countless tigers, lions, cougars, leopards, and other big cats** from enduring inhumane conditions in private homes and backyards.

Meanwhile, banning cub-petting experiences has stopped a key pipeline of big cats into the “exotic pet” trade. Previously, exhibitors often bred cub after cub to exploit for cub petting, taking vulnerable babies from their mothers far too early and setting them up for lives of suffering. Cubs quickly aged out of being able to be handled for cub petting, and exhibitors commonly sold older cubs to irresponsible private “owners” or other roadside zoos.

Advocates worked for years to pass the Big Cat Public Safety Act, and you were beside ALDF every step of the way.

Now, **the law is in danger** from new legislation that has been introduced in Congress.

The bill is misleadingly called the “Protecting Local Zoos Act of 2026,” and it would undo the protections established by the Big Cat Public Safety Act by creating new regulatory loopholes for roadside zoos and other animal exhibitors.

This legislation would reopen the door to cruel cub-petting encounters, allow the breeding and sale of big cats by non-zoological operations, and enable the import and export of big cats from foreign facilities.

The Big Cat Public Safety Act has been highly effective at protecting both animals and public safety, and **it’s critical that we protect it now**. Take action by sending a message to your member of Congress at aldf.org/protectbigcats.



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