



# Animal Welfare Institute

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Good afternoon Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chairman Moon, and Members of the Judiciary Committee. I am Nancy Blaney, director of government affairs for the Animal Welfare Institute and on behalf of our Maryland members, I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 1192.

“One of the most dangerous things that can happen to a child is to kill or torture an animal and get away with it.” Please let that sink in for a minute, and I will come back to it.

Columbine. Parkland. Buffalo. Uvalde. Besides the obvious, what do these mass murders have in common? Their perpetrators had histories of animal abuse.

Time and time again, we learn that individuals, including juveniles, who have committed violent acts against others—whether it be a spouse, a parent, or the 21 schoolchildren and teachers gunned down in Uvalde, Texas—also have a history of abusing animals. Decades of research and constant real-life reminders leave no doubt that animal abuse, especially when it starts at a young age, is a harbinger of future violence. And a cry for professional intervention.

Animal abuse occurs in communities across the country. It is a serious crime on its own, but there is also a [significant link](#) between animal cruelty and violence against humans. [In one study](#), 70 percent of the convicted animal abusers whose records were reviewed had committed at least one other crime; almost 40 percent of that group had committed a violent crime.

That same study found that the animal abusers were five times more likely to commit violent crimes than were non-abusers. This link has been substantiated by study after study and is so strong that in 2016 the FBI began collecting data specifically on [animal abuse](#) as part of its National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).

Not all children who harm animals grow up to be mass murderers or spouse abusers. Nonetheless, it is crucial not only to identify animal abuse as a risk factor for future violence, but also to make sufficient resources available for intervention and rehabilitation.

“One of the most dangerous things that can happen to a child is to kill or torture an animal and get away with it.”

Margaret Meade didn't have all of this research at her disposal when she said that, but, sadly, time has since proven how right she was. By enacting HB 1192, by ensuring that acts of animal cruelty by minors are reported and by encouraging the coordination of services to evaluate, monitor, and support any minor who has committed such an act, we have a better chance of keeping that link in the chain of violence from being forged. Moreover, such intervention may help uncover other problems in the child's life that should also be addressed.

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