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CRUELTY TO ANIMALS SUMMARY – TALKING POINTS

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To quote Alert Schweitzer, “Anyone who has accustomed himself to regard the life of any living creature as worthless is in danger of arriving also at the idea of worthless human lives.” Domestic animals are the only friend some people may have. Pets protect and guard families. They provide independent living for many disabled people who otherwise would be institutionalized or totally dependent on their family or friends. Dogs tirelessly search disaster sites for signs of human life, they work with firefighters and police to save lives as well as search for drugs, bombs and other types of dangerous materials. They bring comfort and laughter to children, adults and the elderly in hospitals, hospices, and homes for the elderly. Studies prove that people who own pets are healthier, have lower blood pressure, and live longer than those who don’t. Pets ask little in return for their loyalty and love – just food, water and affection. These are reasons enough to investigate, arrest and prosecute those who abuse, torture and kill animals. However, the recognized link between those who abuse animals and go on to commit violent and heinous crimes against people further heightens the need to investigate and prosecute these crimes.

The following is a summary of the Animal Cruelty Talking Points.

1. **Prosecutors should not be perceived as tacitly ignoring cruelty to animals.** They **MUST eliminate the “No, we don’t have time to investigate reports of animal abuse – it’s just a dog or cat,” mentality.** The idea that police and prosecutors have more important crimes against people to worry about – than responding to reports of animal abuse – loses much credibility when such abuse is proven to be linked to serious, aberrant, and deadly criminal behavior. Also, it is interesting to note that when the national media learns about an act of animal abuse that takes place – for example in a small rural town – **it becomes a national news story the next morning.** The **vast majority of people care about – and are emotionally touched and outraged when they see and hear about – cruel treatment of innocent animals.** The truth is that, animal abuse stories when picked up by the major media will anger more people – and generate a higher level of disgust and public response -- than when they hear about a child abuse case. Therein lies a **vitaly important message for prosecutors, police, investigators, judges, and others within law enforcement – take animal cruelty reports seriously. Arrest and prosecute abusers – seeking the harshest sentence possible. Let your community know about what you are doing to hold animal abusers accountable for their actions.**

2. **The well-established link between animal cruelty and serial killers, violent criminals, young killers, domestic violence, spouse/partner, child, and elder abuse should prompt law enforcement officials to take reports of animal cruelty seriously.** Prosecutors should consider working with experts to develop educational programs for law enforcement professionals, and others within their communities. These programs should teach people about the overwhelming relationship between animal abuse and other violent offenses. It is important that these training programs specifically instruct those who respond to animal cruelty reports about how to evaluate the animal cruelty charges, as well as to recognize and evaluate signs of spouse/partner, child and elder abuse.

3. **When a child or teen is suspected of animal cruelty** – police **should immediately investigate the validity of these reports of abuse and, if validated, the youth should be prosecuted to the full extend allowable through your state’s animal cruelty laws.** According to Robert K. Ressler, who developed profiles of serial killers for the FBI, “Murderers ... very often start out by killing and torturing animals as kids.” If a child or teen is abusing animals they must be taught that this crime will not be tolerated. Prosecutors should consider working with experts to help develop instructional education programs for parents, teachers, coaches, peers and others about the seriousness of animal cruelty, and the signs they should look for in children and teens suspected of animal abuse.

4. **Prosecutors, police and other law enforcement officials who reside in states that have not yet changed their laws to include felony sentence provisions for certain types of domestic animal abuse—should endeavor to work with victim groups and members of their communities, to encourage their state legislature to strengthen animal cruelty laws to include such sentences.** The nine states that do not have felony sentencing for domestic animal abusers are: Alaska, Arkansas, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi*, North Dakota**, South Dakota and Utah.

* Mississippi has felony provisions for abuse of livestock only.

** South Dakota has a felony bestiality law only.