



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Office of the Attorney General

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Dear Friend:

Thank you for your continued service to the Commonwealth of Virginia as a community activist and animal lover.

As you are probably aware, this session of the General Assembly we have introduced comprehensive animal fighting legislation. These bills were researched and written by my office, and have been introduced in the Senate by Minority Leader Tommy Norment (R-James City County) and in the House by Majority Leader H. Morgan Griffith (R-Salem).

If our bills are passed, Virginia will have some of the strongest animal fighting laws in the nation. Today I am writing to give you the details of our proposals, and ask for your help in the effort to turn these proposals into law.

Here's what our comprehensive animal fighting reform package will accomplish:

- **The knowing attendance at an animal fight would become a Class 1 misdemeanor (exempting undercover law enforcement officers, of course).** Police often have a difficult time differentiating between spectators and participants at a dog fight. Some dogfighters will claim to be there just to watch, to avoid the penalties. Plus, spectators provide much of the profit associated with dogfighting. The money generated by admission fees and gambling helps keep this "sport" alive. Willing participants at dogfights support and engage in a brutal criminal activity.
- **Knowingly allowing a minor to attend a fight or be involved in an animal fight would become a Class 1 misdemeanor.** Many animal fighters have their young children at these fights and thus put their children at jeopardy. This can promote insensitivity to animal suffering, enthusiasm for violence and a lack of respect for the law. Firearms and other weapons have been found at dogfights because of the large amounts of cash present. Animal fighting has been connected to other kinds of crimes, including prostitution, the sale of illegal drugs, gang activity, gambling and homicide. A raid in January 2006 in Mecklenburg County resulted in the arrest of MS13 gang members and Mexican Mafia members. Illegal gambling, narcotics and children as young as the age of 4 were present at the pit. We must do more to deter the exposure of children to animal fighting.

- **Animal cruelty search investigations will be able to be conducted after sunset without more authorization.**
Most animal fighting investigations take a great deal of time and can last well into the night. Under current antiquated animal fighting laws, an investigator must get permission from a court magistrate to continue to execute a valid search warrant once the sun goes down. Our new provision would allow the officer to continue to execute a valid search warrant after sunset without seeking more approval.
- **Cockfighting would become a Class 6 felony, raising it on par with dogfighting.**
Right now, cockfighting is legal unless you gamble on the fight. North Carolina and Maryland have made cockfighting a felony. We don't want our state to become a magnet for those who want to commit this crime.
- **The usage of any device or substance to enhance an animal's ability to fight would become a Class 6 felony.**
Many animal fighters use devices or substances that they put on the animal to enhance its ability to fight. They often cover the animal's coat with toxic substances as well as injecting them with chemicals or steroids to enhance the ability to fight.
- **Forfeiture of the animals would become streamlined.**
Often, animals are inadvertently victimized again upon seizure by the authorities, because they have to sit in cages at an animal shelter for over a year while the criminal case is being resolved. Dogs that have been trained to fight cannot be exercised because often they are aggressive toward other animals and are therefore in constant confinement in a cage and become "cage crazy." Our legislation would streamline the process.

All of our proposals were developed in conjunction with, and largely thanks to the support of, the following likeminded groups: The Humane Society of the United States, Richmond Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Virginia Federation of Humane Societies, Virginia Animal Fighting Task Force, Virginia Animal Control Association, Richmond Animal Care & Control, Virginia Anti-Dogfighting Coalition, Virginia Poultry Federation, Delmarva Poultry Industry Inc. and the Virginia Sheriffs' Association.

I hope you will take the time to contact your local legislators and impress upon them how important this legislation is to you, your family, and the future of our Commonwealth.

The specific bill numbers are S.B. 592 and H.B. 656.

Again, I thank you for your concern for Virginia's animals, and your leadership on this issue. By passing this legislation we will make Virginia a national leader in the effort to end animal fighting, and we will keep Virginia safe and strong.

Sincerely,



Robert F. McDonnell