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Office of Animal Protection Bill Introduced at MN Legislature

In May 2023, the Office of Animal Protection bill was introduced at the Minnesota Legislature. This bill is authored by Sen. John Marty in the MN Senate and Rep. Matt Norris in the MN House of Representatives.

Creating this state office is core to the mission of Animal Folks and our efforts to protect animals through constructive reforms of the criminal justice system.

Laws to protect animals in Minnesota were enacted before statehood. But a law is only as good as its enforcement. This bill focuses on enforcement efforts.

As defined in the bill, this office would be placed under the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. Its purpose is to provide oversight, training, and resources to authorities for the enforcement of animal cruelty laws.

The bill version introduced in 2023 was robust, as 2023 was a fiscal year and there was a large state budget surplus. 2024, however, is a shorter, policy year. In preparation for the 2024 legislative session, numerous meetings were held with stakeholders, supporters, and legislators during the interim months.

The bill was revised and re-introduced (in 2024) with new bill numbers: S.F. 3542 / H.F. 3799.

OUR MISSION

The mission of Animal Folks is to protect animals and fight animal cruelty through constructive and sustainable reforms of the Minnesota criminal and civil justice systems.

OUR POSITIONING

Public safety and crime prevention.

WHO WE SERVE

Animals in Minnesota. We also serve Minnesota residents who believe animals should be treated humanely and authorities who are involved in the enforcement of animal law.

SYSTEM REFORM

Animal Folks accomplishes its mission through a systems-thinking approach. This strategic approach focuses on the development of long-term, sustainable solutions across multiple disciplines to improve the enforcement of animal law and protection of animals.

OUR STRATEGIC APPROACH: PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Our five program areas include: 1) Animal Cruelty Research; 2) Animal Law Resources; 3) Criminal & Civil Justice; 4) Legislative Action; and 5) Outreach & Communication. Depending on funding and need, projects may vary each year.

PROGRAM GOALS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

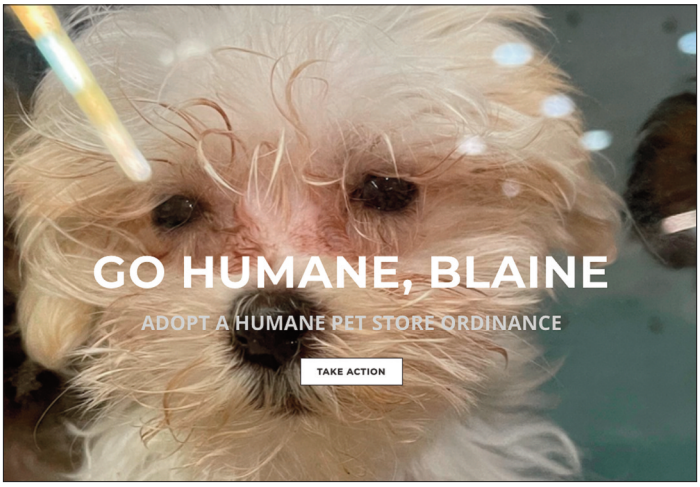
PROGRAM 1: Animal Cruelty Research

GOAL: To research animal cruelty cases and issues pertaining to crimes against animals, and provide credible Minnesota-specific data to the public, elected officials, and organizations upon request.

2023 Strategies and Actions

- **Data requests —** For many years, Animal Folks has requested data from local, state, and federal government agencies. Data requests allow us to track animal sales and inspection violations for businesses, such as puppy mills and pet stores. Having accurate data is essential when lobbying elected officials and testifying.

  Animal Folks has passed "humane pet store ordinances" in Minnesota cities. (Current campaign: Blaine) When a pet store owner claims he or she only buys from small, humane breeders, we are able to dispute this and provide data that proves purchases from puppy mills.



PROGRAM 2: Animal Law Resources

GOAL: To foster professionalism and competency by providing training, resources, and support to Minnesota authorities responsible for the enforcement of animal law.

2023 Strategies and Actions

- **Training and Partnerships** — In partnership with the University of Minnesota, Animal Folks continued providing animal cruelty training for senior veterinary students in 2023. Animal Folks also continued building partnerships with organizations in the social services field who recognize the link between animal cruelty and human violence.

PROGRAM 3: Criminal and Civil Justice

GOAL: To report suspected or known animal cruelty (or related crimes against animals), provide input to criminal and civil cases throughout the legal process and assist victims of animal cruelty in the legal process.

2023 Strategies and Actions

- **Victim Services: Education** — Animal Folks receives multiple calls and emails from Minnesotans asking for assistance or advice about Minnesota law and what to do when their animal is harmed.

PROGRAM 4: Legislative Action

GOAL: To lead and support state and local legislative efforts, including crafting of humane laws, lobbying, and advocacy, that protects animals and lays a foundation for systemic reform.

2023 Strategies and Actions

- **State of Minnnesota: Office of Animal Protection bill** — The mission of Animal Folks is to protect animals through reform of the criminal justice system. From our research over many years, we found multiple issues with how animal cruelty laws are enforced in Minnesota. There is inconsistency throughout the state with enforcement efforts by authorities, including law enforcement, prosecutors, veterinarians, social services, and animal care facilities. This inconsistency is due to multiple factors, such as a lack of cross-discipline training in animal law, a lack of expertise for crimes of animal cruelty, a lack of oversight, a lack of financial resources, and other issues.

  To address these issues and enhance enforcement actions, this bill will establish an Office of Animal Protection under the Department of Public Safety, who are experts in criminal law.

  The original bill was introduced in the 2023 legislative session. The bill was re-introduced in 2024 with new bill numbers: **S.F. 3542 / H.F. 3799.** For further details and an online petition, a website was created: **www.mnoap.org.**

PROGRAM 4: Continued Legislative Action

- **Winona County: Puppy Mill Initiative** — A major effort of Animal Folks in 2023 was to work with residents in Winona County and the Winona County Board to address the problem of puppy mills in their community. Because multiple local permits had been granted by the county to large-scale dog breeding facilities who, in turn, mass produce puppies for sale to pet stores and brokers nationwide, Winona County has become known as the Puppy Mill Capitol of Minnesota.

  Ann Olson, executive director of Animal Folks, attended county board meetings in March, April, May, and October 2023 when the issue was being debated and presented extensive data about puppy mills and the harm to the animals, as well as the ineffective inspection efforts of the USDA and the MN Board of Animal Health. We also coordinated experts to testify and collaborated with residents to build awareness and support of the issue.

  The county board, in a majority vote at the October meeting, agreed to move the issue forward to ban future permits of these dog breeding facilities. A formal vote was set for 2024. Many thanks to residents.
  Learn more at: **www.speakupwinonacounty.org**

- **State of Minnnesota: Companion Animal Board Bill** — In the past decade, the pet sector has grown significantly, creating more issues involving people and their pets. The Companion Animal Board will provide the expertise needed to assist the pet sector. In 2023, Animal Folks actively lobbied this bill and coordinated intensive advocacy efforts. Unfortunately, the agriculture committee chairs favored livestock interests and refused to give the bill a hearing — typical for animal welfare bills. We will continue to fight for the needs of pets and those who care for these animals. Policy and funding for pet welfare must be separated from agriculture. Learn more: **www.mncab.org**

PROGRAM 5: Outreach & Communication

GOAL: To educate the public on animal law and cruelty issues, and enhance communication and cooperation between various stakeholders involved in the enforcement of animal law.

2023 Strategies and Actions

- **Office of Justice Conference** — On May 23-24, 2023, Animal Folks hosted a booth at the Minnesota Office of Justice Crime and Victimization Conference. This conference provided an opportunity to speak with multiple organizations in the social/victim services field, including child abuse and domestic violence and the link to animal cruelty.
- **Tri-County Humane Society (TCHS) Conference** — On May 25, 2023, the Tri-County Humane Society hosted the 20th annual Minnesota Animal Welfare Conference. Animal Folks was pleased to host a booth at this conference which attracted hundreds of animal welfare advocates and pet sector professionals.
- **Minnesota State Fair** — From August 24 to September 4, 2023, Animal Folks hosted a booth at the Minnesota State Fair. This is our third year at the State Fair. We met thousands of Minnesotans and gathered over 2,000 petitions from people in support of the Office of Animal Protection bill. We gave away BE KIND TO ANIMALS buttons and decals plus flyers about animal law and animal protection.

- **Furassic Park** — On September 9, 2023. the Tri-County Humane Society (TCHS) held Furassic Park, a "walk for companion animals" at Wilson Park in St. Cloud. Animal Folks hosted a booth, promoting the Companion Animal Board bill and gaining support.
- **Democracy in Action** — On November 18, 2023, Animal Folks held a booth at this Minnetonka event, gathering many supporters for the state bills.
- **MN Sheriffs' Association Conference** — Animal Folks hosted a booth at the Sheriff Conference on December 5, 2023, meeting numerous sheriffs and deputies.

FINANCES

Animal Folks is proud to be a Charities Review Council Meets Standards® organization and a Gold Guidestar participant.

STATEMENT – Fiscal Year 2023 — January 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023

Support and Revenue	
Individual Contributions	$120,577
In-kind Contributions	$117,115
Corp/Fdtn Contributions	$49,394
Total Support and Revenue	**$287,086**

Expense	
Program Services	$264,220
Fundraising	$21,180
Administration	$22,726
Total Expenses	**$308,126**

Balance Sheet – Fiscal Year 2023

Assets	
Cash	$52,125
Accounts Receivable	$50
Liabilities	
Credit Card Balance	$1,650
Net Assets	$50,525

Program Services: Major Program Expenses	
Animal Cruelty Research	$81,908
Criminal & Civil Justice	$31,706
Animal Law Resources	$73,982
Legislative Action	$50,202
Outreach & Education	$26,422

GOVERNANCE

Animal Folks: Board of Directors

Reese Frederickson
John Kingrey
Marianne Settano Shumaker
Rose Surma
Karen Lundquist
Ann Olson
Advisor: Cynthia Erickson

Our Team

Ann Olson, Founder and Executive Director
Arianna Pittman, Strategic Writer; Communications; Manager, Social Media and Newsletter
Jessie Lyons, Administrative and Database Manager; Animal Cruelty Databank, Project Manager
Megan Helling, Manager, Public Policy and Advocacy
Brittany DeVito, Senior Researcher
Mike Tincher, Design and Marketing
Accountant: Studio 501
Lobbyist: Christopherson Advocates

VALUES

Our actions are guided by our values: Nonviolence, Respect, Ethics, Credibility, and Innovation

THANKS

Thank you to the talented volunteers, advocates, and donors who support Animal Folks.