

SS#2 SCS HCS HB 2292 -- REPORTING OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT

This bill provides that, when certain human service workers, as provided in the bill, witness evidence of or have reasonable cause to suspect that animal abuse or neglect is being perpetrated, such workers must make a report to a hotline established and operated by the Missouri Animal Control Association within one day.

The hotline worker will request the following information:

- (1) The name and description of the animal involved, if known;
- (2) The address and telephone number of the owner or other person responsible for the care of the animal, if known;
- (3) The nature and extent of the suspected abuse or neglect; and
- (4) Any other information the person making the report believes could be useful.

This report will be provided to law enforcement and, if appropriate, a county or municipal animal control officer, or a POST-certified or MACA-certified animal cruelty investigator.

Human service workers required to report under this bill will be immune from civil and criminal liability in connection with making the report if the worker acts in good faith.

Any information identifying the person who reports suspected animal abuse or neglect will be confidential and not considered an open record under Missouri law.

No person required to make a report of animal abuse or neglect under this bill will be permitted to knowingly make a false report. Making a false report will be punishable in the same manner as other false reports to law enforcement under current law.

Failure to make a report established in this bill is also prohibited. A human services worker who fails to make a report will be issued a notice. The notice will not be retained in a permanent employment file and will not be considered an open record under Missouri law. However, such worker will be subject to discipline by his or her licensing board, if applicable.

The duty to report animal abuse or neglect established in this bill will not be in effect during any period in which the hotline established by this bill is not operational.

Such human service workers will receive 1.5 hours of training on this new requirement. The training will be created by the Department of Agriculture, in consultation with the Animal Control Association, and will be available to human service workers during normal working hours.

The training must include the following:

- (1) The requirement to report animal abuse or neglect and the penalties associated with failure to report;
 - (2) How to identify animal abuse or neglect;
 - (3) How to make a report of animal abuse or neglect; and
 - (4) The relationship between abuse or neglect of certain vulnerable populations and animal abuse or neglect.
- (5) All such human service workers will be required to complete the training by December 31, 2027, or within 60 days of initial employment.

Under this bill, "animal" is defined as dogs, cats, rabbits, and domesticated birds.

The bill also provides that, beginning January 1, 2028, when any person employed as an animal control officer or animal humane investigator has reasonable cause to suspect that abuse or neglect of certain older adults, adults with disabilities, or of a child has occurred, the animal control officer or animal humane investigator must immediately report the incident to the Department of Health and Senior Services or the Children's Division. The penalty for failing to make such a report is a class A misdemeanor.

No later than December 31, 2027, animal control officers and animal humane investigators will be required to participate in 1.5 hours of training on this new requirement. The training will be created by the Children's Division, the Department of Health and Senior Services, and the Department of Agriculture, in consultation with the Missouri Animal Control Association and will be available during normal working hours.

The training must include the following:

- (1) Requirements to report abuse or neglect of children and certain adults with disabilities and seniors and the penalties associated with failure to report;
- (2) How to identify such abuse and neglect;
- (3) How to make a report of such abuse and neglect; and
- (4) The relationship between abuse or neglect of certain vulnerable populations and animal abuse or neglect.

All such animal control officers and animal humane investigators will be required to complete the training by December 31, 2027, or within 60 days of initial employment.

The Missouri Animal Control Association, in collaboration with the Department of Health and Senior Services and the Children's Division, will provide an annual report to the Governor and the General Assembly about the reporting requirements described in the bill. The report will include information about:

- (1) Call wait times for reports of abuse and neglect;
- (2) The number of adults, children, and animals for which reports have been submitted; and
- (3) The number of reports for which an investigation determined that abuse or neglect of a person had co-occurred with abuse or neglect of an animal.

The provisions of this bill will expire on December 31, 2030.