



Humane Education Advocates Reaching Teachers

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**WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1024:  
THE ANIMAL CRUELTY AND VIOLENCE INTERVENTION ACT OF 2018  
California Senate Public Safety Committee  
Hearing Scheduled for April 24, 2018**

Humane Education Advocates Reaching Teachers (HEART) submits this written testimony in support of Senate Bill 1024, which would require that all convicted animal cruelty offenders complete an approved animal education course, and offenders convicted under more serious animal abuse statutes undergo mandatory mental health evaluations and counseling if deemed beneficial after evaluation. We believe that educating all offenders in the humane treatment of animals will help reduce recidivism and prevent the escalation of violent behavior.

HEART is a nonprofit, full-service humane education provider based in New York City, with offices in Chicago, Indianapolis and Portland (Oregon). Our mission is to develop a generation of compassionate youth who create positive change for animals, people, and the natural world. We promote development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and conflict resolution skills. HEART teaches K-12 students both in school and out of school; conducts adult education programs, including credit-bearing professional development workshops for teachers and a restorative justice program; and develops a range of educational resources from curriculum and videos to interactive lessons and digital games. Our humane education programs foster empathy and compassion, helping students become caring members of society.

By cultivating empathy for animals, humane education can help prevent and reduce violent patterns of behavior. It has been well documented that there is a link between human and animal violence. Clinical case studies of troubled youth and retrospective studies of violent criminals have repeatedly shown a connection between childhood animal abuse and later interpersonal violence.<sup>1</sup> The American Psychiatric Association uses animal abuse as a criterion in diagnosing youth conduct disorders.<sup>2</sup> High levels of bullying and victimization have been associated with involvement in multiple episodes of animal abuse.<sup>3</sup> Humane education can serve as a valuable deterrent to violence and help break these vicious cycles of abuse.

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1 Phil Arkow, *The Relationship Between Animal Abuse and Other Forms of Family Violence*, 13(2) *Protecting Children* 4-9 (1996); Frank Ascione, *Children Who Are Cruel to Animals: A Review of Research and Implications for Developmental Psychology*, VI (4) *Anthrozoos* 226-247 (1993).

2 American Psychiatric Association, *Conduct Disorder*, in *Cruelty to Animals and Interpersonal Violence* (Randall Lockwood & Frank Ascione eds., Purdue U. Press 1998) at 247-254.

3 B. C. Henry, C. E. Sanders, *Bullying and Animal Abuse: Is There a Connection?* 15 *Society and Animals* 107-126 (2007).

Humane education builds empathy for not only animals, but also people. Research studies show that empathy is an important contributor to prosocial behavior<sup>4</sup> and that children's compassion toward animals is directly related to their empathy toward humans.<sup>5</sup> In two independent evaluations of the impact of our ten lesson humane education program on 1100 students in NYC and Chicago schools (conducted by the Associate Director of Fordham University's Graduate Psychology Department and the Director of Assessment at the City University of New York), the results showed that our curriculum positively affected students' knowledge and attitudes regarding numerous humane education topics (including responsible animal guardianship and the needs of animals), and intervention students were rated by their schoolteachers as being significantly more prosocial than those in the control groups.<sup>6</sup>

We have also seen adults develop empathy and compassion for animals as a result of what they learned in our humane education teacher training workshops and, more recently, our restorative justice program. HEART partnered this year with Bronx Defenders, a public defense nonprofit that provides holistic, client-centered services to low-income people in this NYC borough. So far, we have provided in-person court mandated humane education for two of their clients, and we are working with a third one in May. These clients were charged with misdemeanor neglect of their pets, and we were able to substitute our restorative justice humane education program as an alternative to a term of probation. Our program starts with an assessment of the guardian's needs and support systems, especially noting the link between animal abuse, inadequate care, and other forms of serious family stress and violence. We then move towards exploring empathetic connections to their animals; the feelings, qualities and needs we all share with companion animals; and the distinctive ways that they communicate about these feelings and needs. We then provide a comprehensive list of local low-cost resources that are available to help families meet the needs of their companion animals. It was apparent during these sessions that the clients felt sadness finding out that there are resources they were unaware of that could have assisted them in caring for their animals. It was a positive experience helping them to empathize and deepen their connections to the animals who were part of their lives, as an alternative to a strictly punitive requirement.

HEART believes the animal education provision of SB 1024 will play a critical role in reducing recidivism and violence. We urge you to pass SB 1024 as amended. Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Meena Alagappan  
Executive Director

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- 4 William Roberts & Janet Strayer, *Empathy, Emotional Expressiveness, and Prosocial Behavior*, *Child Development* 67, 449-470 (1996).
  - 5 Frank Ascione, *Enhancing Children's Attitudes about the Humane Treatment of Animals: Generalization to Human-Directed Empathy*, 5 (3) *Anthrozoös* 176-191 (1992); Frank Ascione & Claudia Weber, *Children's Attitudes about the Humane Treatment of Animals and Empathy: One-Year Follow-up of a School-Based Intervention*, 9 (4) *Anthrozoös* 188-195 (1996).
  - 6 Ann Higgins-D'Alessandro, PhD, *Evaluation of the HEART Humane Education Program in NYC*, <http://teachheart.org/2006-assessment-of-the-humane-living-program>; William Ellery Samuels, Lieve Lucia Meers & Simona Normando, *Improving Upper Elementary Students' Humane Attitudes and Prosocial Behaviors through an In-class Humane Education Program*, *Anthrozoös*, 29:4, 597-610 (2016); William Elery Samuels, PhD, *Study Shows HEART Program Leads to More Prosocial Behaviors*, <http://teachheart.org/study-shows-hearts-program-leads-to-more-prosocial-behaviors/>