

Judiciary Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5566 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING ACCELERATED REHABILITATION IN THE CASE OF

Title: ANIMAL CRUELTY.

Vote Date: 3/30/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/18/2026

File No.: 644

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Judiciary Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

In an effort to prevent animal cruelty, this bill restricts the usage of accelerated rehabilitation (AR) for a person convicted of animal cruelty-related offenses to after fifteen or more years have passed since the date on which date that charges were invoked.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

John R. DelBarba, Office of Chief Public Defender: They testified in opposition to HB 5566, arguing that the proposed restriction on AR for animal cruelty cases is unnecessary and unlikely to have practical effect under existing law. They explained that AR is generally available only once (with limited exceptions) and raised concerns that the bill's 15-year restriction may be redundant or misapplied. In the alternative, they suggested that if the bill advances, a 10-year waiting period would be more consistent with other diversionary programs and existing statutory frameworks.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Anita Bardalai: She testified in support of the bill, emphasizing that the bill increases accountability in animal cruelty cases by clarifying when AR may be granted. She noted that animal cruelty is often linked to other forms of violence, including domestic abuse and child or elder abuse, and argued that unrestricted AR could undermine public safety and accountability.

Charles Farfaglia, Court-Appointed Animal Advocate Attorney: He testified in support of HB 5566, emphasizing that AR should be reserved for non-violent, minor, or one-time

offenses. He urged clearer statutory limits excluding serious animal cruelty cases, including intentional harm, use of weapons, repeated abuse, cover-ups, threats, abuse by animal care professionals, large-scale harm, and cases involving severe injury or death, stressing the need to prioritize victims and community safety.

Laura Lynch: She testified in support of HB 5566, providing a brief endorsement of the bill.

Bonnie Mahon: She testified in support of HB 5566, emphasizing that Accelerated Rehabilitation alone is insufficient. She urged for stronger accountability and punishment for animal cruelty, highlighting that offenders often pose ongoing risks to both animals and vulnerable humans.

Laura Marqus: She testified in support of HB 5566, advocating for restrictions on AR eligibility to ensure that violent and repeat offenders are not granted AR inappropriately, emphasizing the need for stronger rules to protect accountability and public safety.

Anita Miller: She testified in support of HB 5566, emphasizing that AR is insufficient for perpetrators of animal cruelty, describing it as a “slap on the wrist” and advocating for accountability that reflects the severity of their actions.

Kathy Radziunas: She testified in support of HB 5566, emphasizing that the bill strengthens accountability for animal abusers by clarifying standards for AR. She highlighted the link between animal cruelty and broader family violence and recommended limiting AR to non-violent offenses, defining “serious” offenses (including intentional killing, starvation, and hoarding), requiring restitution to animal shelters and veterinary providers, and establishing a “Do Not Adopt” registry to prevent recidivism.

Karen Williams: She testified in support of HB 5566, arguing that AR is too often granted in animal cruelty cases and fails to hold offenders accountable. She advocated for removing AR eligibility in such cases altogether, emphasizing that animal abuse is typically violent and requires stronger consequences to prevent repeat offenses.

Ann Diamond: She testified in support of HB 5566, urging passage of the legislation. She emphasized that individuals who harm animals should be carefully evaluated before being given access to animals again, supporting stronger accountability and safeguards in cases of animal cruelty.

Nicole Klarides-Ditria, Representative: She testified in support of HB 5566, highlighting the importance of strengthening accountability in cases involving animal cruelty. She emphasized that while the AR program serves a valuable purpose in appropriate circumstances, its use in animal cruelty cases should be applied carefully with stronger oversight and clearer expectations. She also noted research linking animal cruelty to broader patterns of violence, including domestic violence, and urged support for the bill to protect both animals and public safety while preserving judicial discretion.

Laurel Elliott (Desmonds Army Animal Law): She testified in support of HB 5566, stating that serious animal cruelty cases are too often resolved through the AR program, which she believes can minimize the severity of these offenses. She argued that individuals charged

with serious acts of animal cruelty should not be eligible for AR and emphasized that such crimes require stronger accountability and consequences.

Holly Fontaine, CT Animal Advocate: She testified in strong support of HB 5566, emphasizing that animal cruelty should be treated as a serious offense and that AR is sometimes inappropriately applied in such cases. She argued that limiting AR eligibility would improve accountability, strengthen public safety, and help address the documented link between animal cruelty and other forms of violence, including domestic abuse. She also called for clearer definitions of “serious” offenses and supported restricting AR to low-level, non-violent cases, while urging passage of the bill.

Janice Giordano: She testified in support of HB 5566, stating that the bill strengthens accountability in animal cruelty cases by clarifying when AR may be granted. She emphasized that while AR serves an important purpose, it should not be applied broadly in animal cruelty cases, which are often associated with serious harm and recidivism. She also noted the connection between animal cruelty and other forms of violence, including domestic abuse, child abuse, and elder abuse, and supported limiting AR to better protect public safety and strengthen confidence in the justice system.

David Gorman: He testified in strong support of HB 5566, stating that there should be no AR for individuals who commit acts of animal cruelty. He emphasized that if similar actions were taken against humans, there would be widespread outrage, and argued that animals deserve equal care and dignity.

Annie Hornish, Connecticut State Director, Humane World for Animals: She testified in strong support of HB 5566, emphasizing that animal cruelty is a serious offense that should be excluded from repeated use of AR. The organization supported restricting AR for individuals charged with animal cruelty who have previously used the program unless a significant time has passed, and urged further strengthening of the bill by defining intentional or malicious violations as “serious” offenses ineligible for AR. They highlighted extensive research linking animal cruelty to broader patterns of violence, including domestic abuse, child abuse, and other criminal behavior, arguing that stricter AR limits would improve public safety and accountability.

Susan King: She testified in strong support of HB 5566, expressing concern that individuals found responsible for harming animals may still be granted Accelerated Rehabilitation. She urged the state to strengthen accountability in animal cruelty cases and supported passage of the bill, arguing that it is necessary to ensure appropriate consequences for those who harm animals.

Val Maloney: She testified in support of HB 5566, urging clearer standards for AR and emphasizing the link between animal abuse and other forms of violence. She supported limiting AR to low-level, non-violent offenses and excluding serious acts such as physical violence, starvation, intentional or negligent harm, and hoarding cases.

Kathleen Perez: She testified in support of HB 5566, stating that animal cruelty is a serious offense and that not all cases should qualify for AR. She expressed support for the bill’s effort to limit AR in animal cruelty cases and increase accountability.

G. Simmons: They testified in strong support of HB 5566, calling for zero leniency in animal cruelty cases and arguing that individuals who harm animals should face strict and harsh punishment. They expressed concern that Accelerated Rehabilitation allows offenders to avoid accountability and cited a specific animal cruelty case as an example of inadequate justice, emphasizing the need for stronger consequences and greater protections for animals.

Nan Zyla-Wisensale: She testified in support of HB 5566, stating it would restrict AR in animal cruelty cases and strengthen accountability by ensuring clearer standards for AR eligibility. She emphasized the link between animal cruelty and other forms of violence (including child, spousal, and elder abuse) and the associated public safety risks. She recommended limiting AR to low-level, non-violent offenses and defining “serious” cruelty to include physical violence, starvation, intentional or negligent harm, and hoarding cases.

The following individuals testified in support of the bill, emphasizing that the bill strengthens accountability in animal cruelty cases by clarifying when AR may be granted while preserving judicial discretion. They highlighted the link between animal cruelty and other forms of violence and recommended limiting AR to clearly defined low-level, non-violent offenses and defining “serious” offenses to include physical violence, starvation, intentional or negligent harm, and hoarding, underscoring the importance of taking animal cruelty seriously while balancing second chances and public safety.

Renee Chotiner, Donna DeMuis Dekle, Lori DiTillo, Enid Breakstone, Founder & Executive Director, The Queenie Foundation Inc., James and Tammy Dolce, Cornelia Fortier, Laurie Goodman, Valerie Healy, Christine Kaminski, Emily Keyes, Susan Lennon, Andrea Kerin, Kelly Marchwinski, Keeley Mangeno, Michelle Palmeri, Adriana Petrizzo, Wendy Shanahan, Laura Simon, Nicole Smith, Quintina St. Germain, Lynda Rizzo-Stowe, Carla White, Anonymous 776, Kimberley Zimmermann, Adriana Petrizzo, Lisa Bonaldi, Lynne Cayer, Mandy Wieting, Katherine Stapp, Joshua Levin, Susan Kautz, Kate Marchwinski, Francis Mastri, Chris Kerin, Michael Macary, Larissa Savino, Linda Pleva, Nicole Smith, Jamila Viandier

Anonymous 771: They testified in support of the bill, expressing full support for the bill on accelerated rehabilitation in cases of animal cruelty.

Anonymous 777: They testified in support of the bill, emphasizing that the bill strengthens accountability in animal cruelty cases while preserving judicial discretion. They highlighted the link between animal cruelty and other forms of violence and recommended limiting AR to low-level, non-violent offenses and clearly defining “serious” offenses to enhance public safety.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Kate Nicoll, LCSW: She testified in opposition to HB 5566, stating that restricting AR without mandated trauma-informed psychological assessment and structured treatment options may be counterproductive.

Reported by: Trevor Ellis

Date: April 10, 2026