



## Pet and Women Safety Act of 2015 H.R. 1258 and S.1559



AVMA SUPPORTS

**This bipartisan bill helps protect the pets of domestic abuse victims so that they get the veterinary care they need and the protection they deserve.**

### What will this bill do?

H.R. 1258/S. 1559 will expand federal law to include protections for pets of domestic violence victims and establish a federal grant program that will help ensure that victims have access to safe shelter for their pets. Specifically, the bill aims to assist both female and male victims with pets by: making threats against a pet a stalking-related crime; providing grant funding to increase the availability of housing for victims that accommodates pets; encouraging states to provide coverage for pets under protection orders; and requiring abusers who harm pets to pay veterinary and other expenses incurred as a result.

### What is the problem?

Pets are often the voiceless victims of domestic violence abuse or stalking, where abusers target a beloved pet as an attempt to control and terrorize their human victims. Sometimes the pets are brutally harmed or even die as a result of their abusers' assaults.

Human victims often face the difficult decision of leaving abusive situations without their pets for their own safety or staying put to ensure their animal companions will get the veterinary care they need should they be harmed. Many survivors have reported delaying leaving an abusive situation out of concern for their pets. Unfortunately, a very small percentage of domestic violence shelters nationwide can accommodate pets. This means that victims may be forced to surrender their pets, rather than being able to evacuate with them. Relinquishing a treasured pet further deepens the pain and suffering these victims are already experiencing.

### Why is the AVMA supportive?

The AVMA Steering Committee on Human-Animal Interactions, together with the AVMA Animal Welfare Committee, recommended that the association support this legislation because it is consistent with veterinary efforts to protect the welfare of animals and promote responsible human-animal relationships, including the philosophy encompassed in the association's [Animal Welfare Principles](#) and its resource publication that provides [Practical Guidance for the Effective Response by Veterinarians to Suspected Animal Cruelty, Abuse and Neglect](#). It is also in alignment with information regarding co-occurrence of animal abuse and domestic violence and [state legislative responses](#) in the wake of research studies

### Status of the bill:

- Reps. Katherine Clark (D-Mass.) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) introduced H.R. 1258 on March 4, 2015, and it has been referred to the House Committee on the Judiciary and the House Committee on Agriculture.
- Senator Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) introduced S. 1559 on June 11, 2015, and it has been referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

### Key points:

- Pets can be victims of domestic abuse and stalking and can incur brutal attacks or even death as a way for attackers to further manipulate their human victims.
- Many human victims report delaying leaving or even returning to abusive situations out of fear for the wellbeing of their pets.
- The PAWS Act will expand federal law to create additional protections for pets of domestic violence abuse victims, including boosting access to funds to increase the availability of sheltering options for these pets and assigning responsibility for veterinary and other care expenses to the abuser.
- This bill will also support the recovery process for victims of domestic violence—especially children—who can benefit from the comforting relationship of being with their pets after a traumatic experience.
- This bill is supported by numerous local and national domestic violence, animal welfare and professional organizations.