Violence Prevention and Intervention Fact Sheet

Over the past two decades, recognition has grown of the relationship between animal abuse and other antisocial behavior. Significant practice and policy changes have resulted from increased awareness of the importance of taking animal abuse seriously.

The Research

- Studies have found animal abuse to be significantly associated with antisocial behavior (Vaughn et al., 2009) and interpersonal violence, including bullying, juvenile delinquency, and adult violent crimes (Gelhorn, Sakai, Price, Crowley, 2007; Gullone & Robertson, 2008). Animal abuse has also been found to be associated with family violence (Ascione et al., 2007; Volant et al., 2008).

Law Enforcement Response

- Research on the relationship between animal abuse and other antisocial behavior has resulted in law enforcement recognizing animal abuse as a “crime against society.”

- Starting in 2016, the FBI National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) began collecting information on reports of animal abuse as well as arrests and convictions. The system collects detailed crime statistics that law enforcement agencies nationwide provide to the FBI. The information is critical to informing law enforcement policy and practice. Participation by law enforcement is, however, currently voluntary.

Animal Abuse and the Criminal Justice System

- As of March 2014, all 50 states have felony animal cruelty provisions.

- A number of jurisdictions have begun assigning designated prosecutors to animal abuse cases and/or creating Animal Abuse Units within the District Attorney’s office (e.g., Dallas County, TX, DeKalb County, GA, Fresno County, CA, Queens County, NY).

- Three jurisdictions (Pima County, AZ, Bernalillo County, NM, and Botetourt County, Virginia, VA) have set up specialty courts designed to handle animal cruelty cases.

- Thirty-one states have legislation that makes psychological assessment or treatment mandatory or at the judge’s discretion.

- ASI’s AniCare is the only psychological intervention designed specifically for animal abuse offenders.
Sentencing Alternatives and Gaps

• Most animal abuse charges are misdemeanors, resulting in nothing more than a small fine.

• There is a significant gap in meaningful sentencing alternatives for animal abuse offenders, both pre- and post-adjudication.