

## A Bipartisan Success in Washington

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor  
February 2019

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### Three animal welfare reforms become federal law



December was one of the most chaotic and politically divisive months in recent U.S. memory. We rode the wild ride of the volatile stock market, a stalemate on border-wall funding, a partial government shutdown, intensifying Mueller investigations and prosecutions, and President Trump's surprise and controversial decision to withdraw troops from Syria, followed by the protest resignation of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis. What a month.

But there was one bright spot amid the hullabaloo: The president signed into law the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, better known as the Farm Bill.

The Farm Bill conference report (what a bill is called in its final, approved version) had bipartisan support and passed in the Senate on December 11 and in the House the following day; the Farm Bill of 2018 became the law of the land December 20.

The bill will cost \$428 billion for fiscal years 2019-2023, as determined by the Congressional Budget Office. The American Farm Bureau Federation reports that this five-year legislation provides funding for a wide range of nutrition and agricultural government programs, including crop insurance, land conservation, horticulture, organic agriculture research and education, trade promotion, energy, forestry, and rural development.

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The legislation will also legalize hemp production, and establish research centers at three historically black colleges and universities.

There are three federal animal protection reforms included in the law. The **Dog and Cat Meat Trade Prohibition Act**

prevents dogs and cats from being killed for human consumption in the United States and makes it illegal to import or export these animals for consumption purposes.

The **Parity in Animal Cruelty Enforcement Act** (PACE) prohibits cockfights and dogfights in all U.S. territories. It is already illegal in 50 states.

The **Pet and Women Safety Act** (PAWS) was introduced in the Senate (Senate Bill 322) by Sen. Gary Peters (D-Michigan) and Sen. Dean Heller (R-Nevada), and in the House (HR 909) by Rep. Katherine Clark (D-Massachusetts), who first introduced the bill in 2014, based on a similar state law she sponsored in 2012.

According to the congressional summary, the PAWS Act directs the Department of Agriculture to give grants for shelter and housing assistance, and support services for domestic violence victims with pets.

It also changes the federal criminal code to expand the definition of stalking to include behavior that causes a person to have reasonable fear of death or serious bodily harm to his or her pet.

Interstate violation of a protection order will now include the violation of a protection order against a pet and a specified criminal penalty of a prison term of up to five years, a fine, or both. Domestic violence or interstate protection order violation restitution of the full amount of a victim's losses now includes veterinary costs related to a pet. The PAWS Act stipulates that states should include protections against violence or threats against a person's pet in domestic violence protection orders. (Currently, only 32 states have enacted pet protective order legislation, allowing courts to include pets in restraining orders.)

According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), only three

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percent of domestic violence shelters nationwide currently can accommodate pets. Representative Clark's office notes that up to 25 percent of domestic violence survivors delay leaving an abusive relationship or return to it out of concern for the safety of their pets.

Two days prior to the president's signing, Clark said, "This law empowers survivors with the resources to leave a dangerous situation while being able to continue to care for their family."

"Survivors of domestic violence should never have to decide between leaving an abusive relationship or staying and risking their safety to protect their pets," says Senator Peters. "This bill will help ensure more safe havens for survivors and their pets are available -- so together they can begin a new chapter in their lives."

It has long been known that domestic violence abusers are also violent toward their animals. Abusers exploit the human-companion animal bond in order to control, terrorize, and punish their victims. The ASPCA reported that a study in Wisconsin showed that 68 percent of domestic violence survivors reported their abusers were also violent toward their pets. The new resources provided by the PAWS Act will help remove the obstacles to leaving for many victims.

On January 1, California became the first state to implement a law restricting sales of dogs, cats, and rabbits by retail pet stores. The Pet Rescue and Adoption Act bans the sale of all such animals by California retailers unless the animals originate from rescue or shelter organizations. The new law does not impact sales directly from breeders but aims to limit business opportunities for puppy mills.

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