



LYNNE ABRAHAM
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

**DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
THREE SOUTH PENN SQUARE
CORNER OF JUNIPER AND SOUTH
PENN SQUARE
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19107**

NEWS RELEASE

Date: August 20, 2008
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District Attorney Lynne Abraham Appoints Special Prosecutor for Animal Cruelty Cases

WHAT: NEWS CONFERENCE

WHEN: WEDNESDAY AUGUST 20, 2008

TIME: 11AM

WHERE: PSPCA

350 E. Erie Ave.

2nd Floor Auditorium

**(Cross street is Whitaker Avenue above Erie, but turns into B Street
once you cross Erie)**

**Participants: District Attorney Lynne Abraham
Assistant District Attorney Barbara Paul
Howard Nelson, PSPCA CEO
Elaine Skypala, PSPCA Chief Programs Officer
George Bengal, PSPCA Director of Investigations
Dr. Rachel Lee, PSPCA Chief Investigative Veterinarian
PSPCA Agents
Several rescued animals
Pictures and equipment will be available to photograph**

August 20, 2008----District Attorney Lynne M. Abraham today announced the appointment of Assistant District Attorney Barbara Paul to prosecute all animal cruelty cases in the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office.

D.A. Abraham made the appointment in response to the increase in the number of animal cruelty cases as well as the shocking severity of the cases.

“The number of animal cruelty cases has increased dramatically, whether it be cockfights, dog fighting, mistreatment of horses, torturing cats, shooting dogs or other acts of cruelty, abuse or neglect,” said District Attorney Lynne Abraham. “How we treat our animals is a reflection upon society as a whole. In this office, we seek justice for all victims of crime, and animals are among the most vulnerable members of society. We do not tolerate animal cruelty, and we are committed to prosecuting crimes against animals.”

“We applaud District Attorney Abraham for her commitment to punishing animal abusers,” said PSPCA CEO Howard Nelson. “We are hopeful that Barbara Paul’s appointment as assistant district attorney for animal cruelty will allow cases to be heard sooner and will mean serious repercussions—including stiffer fines and jail time—for those found guilty.”

Why Focus On Animal Cruelty Cases?

According to the American Prosecutors’ Research Institute:

- The vast majority of the population views the enforcement of animal cruelty laws as an important priority.
- Cruelty to animals can be a predictor of crime -- individuals who have a history of intentional violence towards animals are at a higher risk for committing violence or lawlessness towards people in the future.
- Cruelty to animals can be an indicator crime – victimization of animals often occurs concurrently with domestic violence, child abuse and elder abuse.
- Animal neglect, including animal hoarding, often results in potentially serious health consequences. This also becomes a quality-of-life issue for neighbors.

Why Have A Designated Animal Abuse Prosecutor?

Also according to the American Prosecutors’ Research Institute:

- A designated prosecutor will provide enhanced attention to crimes against animals and the successful prosecution of those crimes.
- A designated prosecutor will help improve the investigation of animal cruelty allegations, and coordinate resources between animal control and police leading to successful prosecution.
- A designated prosecutor will develop specialized knowledge of relevant laws and proposed legislation.
- A designated prosecutor will coordinate agency response to animal cruelty, including the Pa. SPCA and Department of Licenses and Inspections.
- A designated prosecutor will develop educational and/or diversionary programs in coordination with the Pa. SPCA for delinquent charged or adjudicated juveniles.

The Pennsylvania SPCA (PSPCA) has six humane officers to cover the entire city of Philadelphia, responding to the thousands of calls made to the organization's cruelty hotline and abuse email account. The agents are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The PSPCA has seen a dramatic rise in acts of animal cruelty in Philadelphia and across Pennsylvania this year. Since launching its 1-866-601-SPCA anti-cruelty reporting hotline on January 30th, the PSPCA law enforcement unit has received more than 4,700 calls — almost quadruple original expectations.

“When we started the hotline, we estimated 200 calls per month, which would have been 1,200 calls after six months,” said PSPCA CEO Howard Nelson. “We are averaging almost 30 calls a day, putting us over 4,700 calls to date.”

It is not just the number of cruelty calls that has made the officers' jobs more difficult, but also the severity of the abuse. “We are seeing savage beatings and starvation cases in which the animals die a slow, painful death,” said PSPCA Director of Investigations George Bengal. “For instance, dogs that should weigh at least 50 pounds are coming in with protruding hipbones and ribs. They are nothing but skin and bones. That type of neglect does not happen overnight. It takes months to reach that point.”

In some cases, the perpetrators are under 16 years of age. On July 29, PSPCA officers responded to a call of a dead cat on the 59XX block of Shisler Street. The cat had been beaten to death by a twelve year old, who was taken into police custody. On July 31, a PSPCA officer removed five dogs from the XX block of Ruby Street. The pit bulls had been used for fighting by their 15-year old owner. On August 9, the PSPCA removed three dogs from the 34XX block of Kip Street. One dog was so severely infested with maggots that it had to be euthanized. A 16-year old resident of the home, who had recently been released from a juvenile detention center, was taken into police custody for possessing a stolen handgun.

For the lucky animals that make it to the PSPCA alive, their journey to a new home can be stalled for months. “If the animal has been abandoned or if the owner will not surrender the animal to us, our hands are tied,” said Bengal. “We are forced to keep animals in protective custody while we wait for cases to go to trial. The system is so backed up, that it can be months before the court date. If there is a stay, then it could be even longer before the fate of the animals is decided.”

As the number of crimes against animals continue to escalate, the number of animals in PSPCA protective custody rises. About half of the animals in the PSPCA's care are a part of court proceedings.

“I am grateful to work for an Office that is so deeply committed to assisting victims of crime in Philadelphia, including its animals,” said Assistant District Attorney Barbara Paul. “I am excited to be able to prosecute cases for which I feel such passion and I am honored to work with the staff at the PSPCA, who are so clearly devoted to the relief of the suffering of abused and neglected animals in Philadelphia.”

ADA Paul is a veteran prosecutor, who has worked in our Family Violence and Sexual Assault Unit, directed D.A. Abraham's Elder Justice Project and currently works in the PCRA Unit of the Law Division. She shares her home with five rescue cats: Jake, Zachariah, Betty, Judy & Max.

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