



ULSTER COUNTY NEWS

ULSTER COUNTY NEWS INFORMATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ulster County District Attorney Donald Williams - VanBramer Press Release

Ulster County Court Judge J. Michael Bruhn has released the official report of the August, 2006 Term of the Ulster County Grand Jury which recommends sweeping reform in New York State's animal cruelty laws and endorses a comprehensive plan to protect companion animals under the control of self-proclaimed pet rescue operations. This report was issued at the request of District Attorney Williams after the Grand Jury declined to file criminal charges against Bruce VanBramer on allegations of animal cruelty in his operation of ZPR Limited, described by VanBramer and his supporters as an "animal rescue facility."

Williams explained that the Grand Jury's official report addresses the inadequacies of New York State law in regulating self-proclaimed animal shelters, hospices and rescue operations; establishes minimum standards for the care of companion animals and amends outdated and confusing laws criminalizing acts of animal cruelty.

District Attorney Williams stated, "I commend the Grand Jurors for the time and effort they expended in their review and report. The legislative changes recommended by the Grand Jury will provide State and local authorities the real opportunity to monitor self-proclaimed rescue operations and hold accountable those individuals who fail to provide appropriate care for animals under their watch."

Williams encapsulated the Grand Jury's conclusions and recommendations as follows:

1. The current Agriculture and Markets Law defining animal cruelty is ambiguous, confusing and antiquated. The Jury recommends that the New York State Legislature amend such laws to include clear, concise and modern terminology. The new laws should specifically define shelters, rescue operations and hospices and clearly and simply define acts of animal cruelty which rise to the level of criminal behavior.
2. New York State Law is devoid of minimum standards of care to ensure the welfare of companion animals under the control of self-proclaimed rescue operations. The Grand Jury recommends that the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets or an appropriate independent New York State agency develop, publish and implement minimum standards requiring animal rescue operations to provide essential and basic needs for animals under their care.

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3. The current New York State law lacks rules and regulations permitting State or local entities to uniformly monitor self-proclaimed animal rescue operations. The Grand Jury recommends that legislation be passed either expanding the powers of the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets or creating an independent State agency empowered with the authority to identify, monitor, regulate and license such operations. This State agency should also be empowered to enforce any violation of such rules short of criminal conduct.

Williams added, “Significantly, the Grand Jurors noted that they do not wish to discourage private individuals or organizations from selfless efforts to care for unwanted animals. Indeed, the Grand Jury recognized the continuing need and invaluable service to our community for such pet care facilities. However, the Grand Jury is unwavering in its position that these organizations operate pursuant to minimum standards for the care of companion animals and under the supervision of a State agency.”

District Attorney Williams also asked the State Legislature to pursue new laws that would specifically address animal hoarding, an increasing problem in the United States in which individuals “collect” a large number of animals and are either unwilling or unable to provide minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation and veterinarian care. “Although, individuals who accept a large number of animals may be unable to discern the harm that may result, this does not minimize or justify the resulting suffering of the animals they collect. A comprehensive Statewide plan identifying rescue operations, licensing such facilities, establishing minimum standards for the humane treatment of sheltered animals and regulating such facilities will provide early intervention and thus, reduce if not eliminate, the suffering of companion animals.”

Williams emphasized that such legislation should include criminal penalties for those who choose to ignore the plight of animals under their watch and psychiatric care for those unable to recognize this perilous situation. Williams referred parties concerned with this dangerous situation to a series of articles available on-line at GOTOBUTTON BM_1_ www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa/hoarding.html.

“I would like to thank the Grand Jury, District Attorney Williams and all of the parties involved in examining this important issue,” said Assemblyman Kevin Cahill. “I will soon be reintroducing legislation that addresses the issue of companion animal hoarding and gives law enforcement agencies the authority to intervene in situations like these before they reach the level of animal cruelty. I plan on working with the Department of Agriculture and Markets and the multitude of animal advocacy organizations across the State who deal with these issues on a daily basis to figure out how best to transform these recommendations, where appropriate, into legislation that will be effective here in New York.”

The animal hoarding bill (A.1691) Mr. Cahill was referring to was previously carried by Assembly member Paul Tonko, who recently left the Assembly to become the President and CEO of the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.

District Attorney Williams expressed his appreciation to the New York State Humane Association, Ulster County Sheriff’s Department, Ulster County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, PETA and Assistant District Attorney Lauren E. Swan for their assistance and cooperation in this matter.