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[Home](#) > Suffolk lawmakers to weigh legislation to protect neglected dogs

Suffolk lawmakers to weigh legislation to protect neglected dogs ^[1]

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Mar
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2017

Politicians usually enact legislation that helps people who can vote for them, but on Tuesday, Suffolk lawmakers will hold a public hearing in Riverhead that is quite literally for the dogs.

Amendments sponsored by Legis. Monica Martinez (D-Brentwood) are aimed at greatly strengthening existing legislation intended to protect dogs that are kept outdoors in restraints day and night under filthy and wet conditions without water.

The new legislation, according to humane groups, would delineate specific protections that can be more easily enforced and prosecuted.

“There are thousands of neglected dogs,” said Linda Klampfl, of Medford, president of Almost Home, a group that does outreach and seeks to rescue dogs from the worst situations. “We’ve

seen dogs starve to death on the end of a chain, they are never allowed indoors, they freeze in the winter and suffer in the summer and live horribly lonely lives.”

The new measure will bar use of pronged collars and requires tethered dogs to be on dry ground and have fresh potable water. The bill mandates that restraints can weigh no more than 12.5 percent of the dog’s weight and not exceed 15 pounds for any dog. It also bars any restraints that would allow a dog to move over a barrier such as a fence, which could result in strangulation.

The measure also prohibits keeping a dog fastened or tied up to stationary objects for more than two hours at a time between the hours of 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. and bans such restraints from being used overnight from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m.

It also forbids the restraining of dogs that are sick or injured, are nursing mothers, and puppies less than six months old. It also prohibits outdoor restraint of dogs when the temperature is below freezing, above 90 degrees or when the National Weather Service has issued a heat or wind chill advisory, watch or warning.

Most importantly, it makes such violations an unclassified misdemeanor, subject to a \$250 fine and up to five days in jail for the first offense, \$500 and up to 15 days for the second offense, and \$1,000 and up to 30 days for the third offense. Anyone found guilty three or more times can also be subject to losing their animal.

Backers say making violations a misdemeanor and making provisions more specific will make it easier for police to enforce the law. “Changing the language in the law to make it more specific will give police more leverage,” said Lillian Lennon of East Moriches, president of RSVP, another animal rescue group.

Supporters say the battle is still uphill because humane groups are understaffed, police often have more pressing priorities and access to animals is often limited, so problems are not easily visible. Kristin Siarkowicz of Bayport, a Babylon animal control officer who helped draft the latest amendments, said, “It may not solve every dog’s problem overnight, but it will be part of a long-term solution.”

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