WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2024 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

Senate Bill 221

By Senators Weld, Grady, and Maroney

[Introduced January 11, 2024; referred  
to the Committee on the Judiciary]

A BILL to amend and reenact §61-8-19 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to cruelty to animals; creating the felony offense of aggravated cruelty to animals; creating the felony offense of malicious killing, torture, or mutilation of an animal; providing criminal penalties for these offenses; modifying the elements of the existing offense of cruelty to animals; and defining a term.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 8. CRIMES AGAINST CHASTITY, MORALITY AND DECENCY.

§61-8-19. ~~Cruelty~~ Aggravated cruelty to animals; malicious killing or torture; cruelty to animals; penalties; exclusions.

(a)(1) It is unlawful for any person to intentionally or knowingly: ~~or recklessly~~

~~(A) Mistreat an animal in cruel manner;~~

~~(B) Abandon an animal;~~

(A) Cause serious bodily injury to an animal;

~~(C)~~(B) Withhold any of the following which results in the serious injury or death of an animal:

(i) Proper sustenance, including food or water;

(ii) Shelter that protects from the elements of weather; or

(iii) Medical treatment, necessary to sustain normal health ~~and fitness or to end the suffering of any animal;~~

(C) Failing to provide proper care to end the suffering of any animal;

(D) Abandon an animal to die without proper medical care; or

(E) Leave an animal unattended and confined in a motor vehicle ~~when physical injury to or death of the animal is likely to result~~ resulting in the death of the animal.

~~(F) Ride an animal when it is physically unfit;~~

~~(G) Bait or harass an animal for the purpose of making it perform for a person's amusement;~~

~~(H) Cruelly chain or tether an animal; or~~

~~(I) Use, train or possess a domesticated animal for the purpose of seizing, detaining or maltreating any other domesticated animal.~~

(2) Any person who violates subdivision (1), subsection (a) of this section is guilty of a felony and, upon conviction, shall be fined not less than $1,000 nor more than $3,000 or imprisoned in a state correctional facility not less than one nor more than three years, or both fined and confined.

(b) A person who intentionally tortures, or mutilates, or maliciously kills an animal, or causes, procures, or authorizes any other person to torture, mutilate, or maliciously kill an animal, is guilty of a felony and, upon conviction, shall be confined in a correctional facility not less than one nor more than five years and be fined not less than $1,000 nor more than $5,000. For the purposes of this subsection, "torture" means an action taken for the primary purpose of inflicting pain.

(c)(1) It is unlawful for any person to recklessly:

(A) Mistreat an animal in cruel manner;

(B) Abandon an animal;

(C) Withhold;

(i) Proper sustenance, including food or water;

(ii) Shelter that protects from the elements of weather; or

(iii) Medical treatment, necessary to sustain normal health and fitness or to end the suffering of any animal;

(D) Abandon an animal to die; or

(2) It is unlawful for any person to intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly:

(A) Ride an animal when it is physically unfit;

(B) Bait or harass an animal for the purpose of making it perform for a person's amusement;

(C) Cruelly chain or tether an animal; or

(D) Use, train, or possess a domesticated animal for the purpose of seizing, detaining, or maltreating any other domesticated animal.

(E) Leave an animal unattended and confined in a motor vehicle when physical injury to or death of the animal is likely to result;

(3) Any person in violation of ~~subdivision (1)~~ subdivisions (1) or (2) of this subsection is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, ~~thereof~~ shall be fined not less than $300 nor more than $2,000 or confined in jail not more than six months, or both fined and confined.

~~(c)~~(d) A person, other than a licensed veterinarian or a person acting under the direction or with the approval of a licensed veterinarian, who knowingly and willfully administers or causes to be administered to any animal participating in any contest any controlled substance or any other drug for the purpose of altering or otherwise affecting said animal’s performance is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, ~~thereof~~ shall be fined not less than $500 nor more than $2,000.

~~(d)~~(e) Any person convicted of a violation of this section forfeits his or her interest in any animal and all interest in the animal vests in the humane society or county pound of the county in which the conviction was rendered and the person is, in addition to any fine imposed, liable for any costs incurred or to be incurred by the humane society or county pound as a result.

~~(e)~~(f) For the purpose of this section, the term "controlled substance" has the same meaning ascribed to it by §60A-1-101(d) of this code.

~~(f)~~(g) The provisions of this section do not apply to lawful acts of hunting, fishing, trapping or animal training or farm livestock, poultry, gaming fowl or wildlife kept in private or licensed game farms if kept and maintained according to usual and accepted standards of livestock, poultry, gaming fowl or wildlife or game farm production and management, nor to humane use of animals or activities regulated under and in conformity with the provisions of 7 U.S.C. §2131, *et seq*., and the regulations promulgated thereunder, as both statutes and regulations are in effect on the effective date of this section.

~~(g)~~(h) Notwithstanding ~~the provisions of~~ subsection (a) of this section, any person convicted of a second or subsequent violation of that subsection ~~(a)~~ is guilty of a misdemeanor and, shall be confined in jail for a period of not less than ninety days nor more than one year, fined not less than $500 nor more than $3,000, or both confined and fined. The incarceration set forth in this subsection is mandatory unless the provisions of subsection ~~(h)~~ (i) of this section are complied with.

~~(h)~~(i)(1) Notwithstanding any provision of this code to the contrary, no person who has been convicted of a violation of ~~the provisions of~~ subsection (a) or (b) of this section may be granted probation until the defendant has undergone a complete psychiatric or psychological evaluation and the court has reviewed the evaluation. Unless the defendant is determined by the court to be indigent, he or she is responsible for the cost of the evaluation.

(2) For any person convicted of a violation of subsection (a) or (b) of this section, the court may, in addition to the penalties provided in this section, impose a requirement that he or she complete a program of anger management intervention for perpetrators of animal cruelty. Unless the defendant is determined by the court to be indigent, he or she is responsible for the cost of the program.

~~(i)~~ (j) In addition to any other penalty which can be imposed for a violation of this section, a court shall prohibit any person so convicted from possessing, owning, or residing with any animal or type of animal for a period of five years following entry of a misdemeanor conviction and fifteen years following entry of a felony conviction. A violation under this subsection is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine not exceeding $2,000 and forfeiture of the animal.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to create the felony offenses of aggravated cruelty to animals and malicious killing, torture, or mutilation of an animal. It also modifies the grounds making up the existing offense of cruelty to animals. The bill creates a criminal penalty and defines a term.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.