



Animal Welfare Institute

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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF VIRGINIA BILL HB 223
BEFORE THE HOUSE COURTS OF JUSTICE – CRIMINAL COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 2, 2024
SUBMITTED BY NANCY BLANEY, DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS
ANIMAL WELFARE INSTITUTE**

Chairwoman Watts and distinguished Committee Members, I am Nancy Blaney, a 40-year resident of Arlington and director of government affairs for the Animal Welfare Institute, and I very much appreciate this opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of our over 6,000 Virginia supporters in favor of HB 223, which will strengthen Virginia’s law regarding prohibiting animal ownership by individuals who have been convicted of animal cruelty crimes. To its credit, Virginia is already one of the 30-plus states that have post-conviction bans, but HB 223 would make this law more robust by making sure that it applies in cases of both felonies and misdemeanors, and establishing the possibility for a lifetime ban in the case of a felony animal cruelty conviction.

One of the weaknesses of the current law is that the any prohibition that would be imposed would apply only to companion animals. While the original version of HB 223 would have applied to all animals, the substitute unfortunately has returned to applying to “companion animals,” with expanded coverage to equines. We respectfully urge the subcommittee to return to the original version and make the prohibition apply to all animals. Such post-conviction ownership bans are effective tools in preventing future abuse but to the extent that they are limited in coverage, their effectiveness is limited as well. If certain animals are excluded from the protection of a ban, then the opportunity still exists for convicted abusers to find other victims and go right on mistreating animals. It is important to limit to the fullest extend a convicted abuser’s access to animals for an ownership prohibition to be as strong a preventive measure as it can be. However, even with this amendment, the bill strengthens current law so if the subcommittee opts not to return to the original version, AWI would still request the subcommittee to report HB 223 favorably.

Thank you again for accepting this testimony.

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