

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 674

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & CIVIL JURISPRUDENCE

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Hearing Date: March 17, 2021 8:00 AM

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Piper Nelson, CPSO

The SAFE Alliance

Austin, TX

So frequently, survivors of family or domestic violence do not leave dangerous situations because of their concern about the safety of their pets. The SAFE Alliance explicitly allows pets into our domestic violence shelter because we want to remove any barrier that a survivor might face to leaving a violent home or situation. To that end, it is imperative that pets be included in the protective order process to extend the protection afforded, thereby further supporting survivors of violence that are ready to leave the perpetrator of violence. The SAFE Alliance fully supports this bill.

Paige Flink, CEO

The Family Place

Dallas, TX

My name is Paige Flink, I am the CEO of The Family Place, Texas' largest provider of domestic violence services. I am writing in support of HB 674.

During my 30-year tenure at The Family Place I have heard from countless survivors of domestic violence. Some of these survivors were not only fleeing an abusive intimate partner, but also expressed their anxiety of leaving behind their beloved pet who had also experienced violence at the hands of their abuser. I will never forget the hotline call from a woman who had fled to her mother's house without her dog only to return home and find out that her husband had carried through on his threats to kill it. She made the gruesome discovery of a dismembered poodle in her freezer. At that moment, I knew that abusers would not stop when they truly wanted to harm their victim.

This horrible event supports the outcome of multiple research studies conducted on the intersection of domestic violence and animal abuse, determining that 49% to 71% of battered women had pets that had been threatened, harmed, and or killed by their partners. These studies have also found a significant association between physical and severe psychological intimate partner violence perpetration and a history of animal abuse, as well as an association between pet abuse and controlling behaviors in violent relationships.

In a protective order in Texas, the court may prohibit a party from removing a pet, companion animal, or assistance animal, as defined by Section 121.002, Human Resources Code, from the possession of a person named in the order. Unfortunately, most domestic violence survivors are not aware that this provision is part of a protective order or that is available to them.

For many survivors, a protective order is the first step toward safety and accountability for their abuser. I ask you to support this bill on behalf of the woman who just fled to our shelter with two of her three dogs. She had stayed with the abuser because he used the dogs to control her. However, when he killed her favorite one in front of her, she knew she had to leave. She was not aware that a protective order would have also covered her dogs and allowed her to have possession of them. If she had known, she might have fled sooner and her favorite pet's life would have been saved as well.

Please support HB 674. There are vulnerable lives depending on your actions.

Thank you.

Seetha Kulandaisamy

Texas Council on Family Violence

Austin, TX

The Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV) commends the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence for their

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time and careful consideration on the legislation ensuring greater access to the information on protective order applicant's ability to protect their pets when filing in Texas. TCFV registers in strong support of HB 674 and we thank Representative Ramos for her leadership on this bill.

As a statewide coalition of family violence service providers and allied professionals, TCFV has worked on behalf of victims of family violence and their families for 40 years. It is the only nonprofit coalition in Texas dedicated solely to creating safer communities and promoting freedom from family violence. With statewide reach and direct local impact, TCFV shapes public policy, equips service providers, and initiates strategic prevention efforts through its collective strength of more than 1,000 professionals and 86 family violence program members. TCFV stands strong with its members and collaborative partners to provide a safer future for victims and their families. We believe HB 674 is in line with this mission.

For many, pets are family and in our work with organizations housing and supporting survivors on their path to a safer future free from violence, we have witnessed firsthand the power of pet companionship. They fill the gaps of comfort, emotional safety, and trust once shattered by destructive intimate relationships. They pave the way for healing trauma in the aftermath of abuse.

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence in partnership with the Humane Society have shown an established link between domestic violence and animal abuse with 85% of domestic violence shelters reporting survivors commonly discuss pet battering of some kind by their abuser and up to 40% of victims finding themselves trapped in abusive situations out of fear of what will happen to their pets when they leave.

At the point in time when the threat to a victim's safety is greatest and the need for a protective order most urgent, having every piece of information readily available on how to protect themselves and their family is of utmost importance. This information proactively being dispersed to survivors and made accessible to advocates aiding in the process of safety planning is paramount to both survivor safety and empowerment. Knowing that their pets have a right to protection could mean the difference between staying in a dangerous, potentially lethal, situation and seeking the basic protections necessary to survive.

TCFV applauds Representative Ramos for understanding the need for this information awareness in situations of danger and duress and for filing HB 674 to address this issue. We urge the Legislature, in particular the House Committee on Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence, to vote this bill favorably from committee to ensure victims know their options in their search for protection for both themselves and the ones they love.