

# Reporting Animal Cruelty in Tennessee

Ways to work effectively with law enforcement agencies to protect animals in your community.



MEREDITH LEE/HSUS

## Take action and make a report to law enforcement

**Familiarize yourself with relevant laws:** Understanding your [local](#) and [state cruelty laws](#) and is vital to helping animals. Officers often use generally accepted standards of animal care to interpret potential violations when a definition is not explicit. *Important note:* poverty and structural inequality create obstacles to affordable veterinary and pet wellness services. With tens of millions of pets living with families in poverty, the extreme lack of access to resources is a national crisis. Many cases of perceived neglect are likely to be resolved through resources and support.

**Document:** With dates, times, exact location, type of animals involved, specific details and, if possible and from a lawful viewpoint, video and photographs. Evidence obtained through trespassing is not usable by law enforcement.

**Make the call:** Dialing 911 is the quickest way to get a response if an animal is in immediate distress. Otherwise, call the non-emergency number. Request the incident number and note of the date/time. You may wish to remain anonymous, but officers are better equipped to address cases with credible witnesses.

**Follow up:** If you do not receive an update in 2-3 days and a serious situation has not changed. Record who you spoke with and notes about discussions. Remain respectful. If an animal is in imminent danger, you can contact a supervising officer, local or state official, or prosecutor's office to request action. Social media can be a great tool for raising awareness but requests for people unrelated to the case to call law enforcement are often ineffective. It can be harmful to post details of a case that is currently under investigation.

**Advocate for stronger laws:** Effective laws are critical to animal protection. Your officials need to hear from you. One of the most impactful ways to help in your own community is through an ordinance. For example, many localities have enacted ordinances designed to protect dogs who live outdoors. Check out [our advocate's toolkit](#) for suggestions on passing such an ordinance in your area, in addition to tips on lobbying elected officials.

## HSUS Resources for Law Enforcement Agencies

### Animal Rescue & Response Team

This team works with local, state, and federal law enforcement to investigate the most urgent cases of animals in crisis. Resources HSUS can offer include case guidance and support, on-scene assistance with evidence collection, animal handling, transportation, and support with temporary sheltering and placement through our network of partners—at no cost to the community. For us to deploy, an official request must be made through the appropriate emergency management or law enforcement. To request assistance email us at:

[animalcruelty@humanesociety.org](mailto:animalcruelty@humanesociety.org)

### Law Enforcement Training Center (LETC)

HSUS' LETC provides training to thousands of law enforcement officers each year on investigating and prosecuting illegal animal cruelty and fighting. Trainers are former and current law enforcement with expertise in animal crimes. They offer a variety of courses on different topics, and work with agencies to provide relevant, customized courses. Please email us at: [lawenforcementtraining@humanesociety.org](mailto:lawenforcementtraining@humanesociety.org)

### Puppy Mill Rewards

HSUS offers a reward of up to \$5,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of a commercial breeding facility ("puppy mill") operator for illegal animal cruelty. Report a puppy mill at:

[animalcruelty@humanesociety.org](mailto:animalcruelty@humanesociety.org)

### Animal Fighting Rewards

HSUS offers a reward of up to \$5,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone involved in dogfighting or cockfighting. Contact: [animalfighting@humanesociety.org](mailto:animalfighting@humanesociety.org)

### Tennessee State Director

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# Tennessee Animal Cruelty Laws at a Glance

For a complete listing of Tennessee's anti-cruelty laws, visit [https://www.animallaw.info/statutes/us/tennessee\\*](https://www.animallaw.info/statutes/us/tennessee*)

## **TCA 39-14-202 Cruelty to animals**

**Penalty:** *Class A misdemeanor punishable by less than one year in jail and fines up to \$2,500. A subsequent conviction is a Class E felony punishable by 1-6 years in prison and fines up to \$3,000.*

A person commits an offense who intentionally or knowingly:

- Tortures, maims or grossly overworks an animal;
- Fails unreasonably to provide necessary food, water, care or shelter for an animal in the person's custody;
- Abandons unreasonably an animal in the person's custody;
- Transports or confines an animal in a cruel manner; or
- Inflicts burns, cuts, lacerations, or other injuries or pain, by any method, including blistering compounds, to the legs or hooves of horses in order to make them sore for any purpose including, but not limited to, competition in horse shows and similar events.

\*See TCA 39-14-202 for additional details and exceptions.

## **TCA 39-14-212 Aggravated cruelty to animals**

**Penalty:** *Class E felony punishable by 1-6 years in prison and fines up to \$3,000.*

A person commits aggravated cruelty to animals when, with no justifiable purpose, the person intentionally or knowingly:

- Kills, maims, tortures, crushes, burns, drowns, suffocates, mutilates, starves, or otherwise causes serious physical injury, a substantial risk of death, or death to a companion animal; or
- Fails to provide food or water to the companion animal resulting in a substantial risk of death or death.

\*See TCA 39-14-212 for additional details and exceptions.

## **TCA 39-14-203 Fighting or baiting exhibitions**

**Penalties:** *Except for any offense involving a cock, an offense involving a, b, or c is a Class E felony punishable by 1-6 years in prison and fines up to \$3,000. An offense involving a cock, or other actions other than a, b or c is a Class A misdemeanor punishable by less than one year in jail and fines up to \$2,500.*

It is unlawful for any person to:

- (a) Own, possess, keep, use or train any bull, bear, dog, cock, swine or other animal, for the purpose of fighting, baiting or injuring another such animal, for amusement, sport or gain;
- (b) Cause, for amusement, sport or gain, any animal referenced in subdivision to fight, bait or injure another animal, or each other;
- (c) Permit any acts stated in subdivisions and to be done on any premises under the person's charge or control, or aid or abet those acts;
- Be knowingly present, as a spectator, at any place or building where preparations are being made for an exhibition for the fighting, baiting or injuring of any animal, with the intent to be present at the exhibition, fighting, baiting or injuring;
- Knowingly cause a person under eighteen (18) years of age to attend an animal fight; or

- Possess, own, buy, sell, transfer, or manufacture cock fighting paraphernalia with the intent that the paraphernalia be used in promoting, facilitating, training for, or furthering cock fighting.

\*See TCA 39-14-203 for additional details and exceptions.

## **TCA 39-14-214 Animal Sexual Abuse (Bestiality)**

**Penalty:** *Class E felony punishable by 1-6 years in prison and fines up to \$3,000.*

A person commits an offense who knowingly:

- Engages in any sexual activity with an animal;
- Causes, aids, or abets another person to engage in any sexual activity with an animal;
- Permits any sexual activity with an animal to be conducted on any premises under his or her charge or control;
- Engages in, organizes, promotes, conducts, advertises, aids, abets, participates in as an observer, or performs any service in the furtherance of an act involving any sexual activity with an animal for a commercial or recreational purpose; or
- Photographs or films, for purposes of sexual gratification, a person engaged in a sexual activity with an animal.

\*See TCA 39-14-214 for additional details and exceptions.

## **TCA 39-14-210 Humane societies/cost of animal care**

- Any law enforcement agency, or their designee into whose custody any animal victimized under this part is placed, may petition the court requesting that the person from whom the animal is seized, or the owner of the seized animal, be ordered to post security.
- The security shall be in an amount sufficient to secure payment of all reasonable expenses expected to be incurred
- Reasonable expenses include, but are not necessarily limited to, the estimated costs of veterinary care and treatment for the animal as well as the estimated costs of boarding and otherwise caring for the animal.
- The amount of security shall be determined by the court after taking into consideration all of the facts and circumstances of the case. If the posting of security is ordered pursuant to this subsection, then the law enforcement agency, or their designee may draw from the security the actual costs incurred in caring and providing for the seized animal pending disposition of criminal charges.
- Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to prevent the voluntary, permanent relinquishment of any animal by its owner to a law enforcement agency, or their designee in lieu of posting security. The voluntary relinquishment has no effect on the outcome of the criminal charges.

\*See TCA 39-14-210 for additional details and exceptions.

## **Other Statutes of Interest**

- [TCA 39-14-217](#) - Aggravated cruelty to livestock
- [TCA 36-3-601-606](#) Domestic Violence – Domestic Abuse
- [TCA 1-401-403](#) Cross Reporting of Animal Cruelty

