



AMERICAN
KENNEL CLUBSM

Stacey Ober, J.D.
Government Relations
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New England

April 24, 2024

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Sr.
House Committee on Judiciary, Room 101
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: Amend H. 7970 AN ACT RELATING TO DOMESTIC RELATIONS -- DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

Dear Chairman Craven and Members of the Committee:

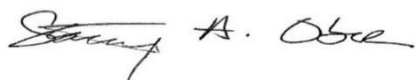
The American Kennel Club writes to you today on behalf of the many responsible dog owners in Rhode Island regarding H. 7970, which addresses the issue of contested pet ownership.

Founded in 1884, the American Kennel Club (AKC) is a recognized and trusted expert in canine health, breeding, and training, and in promoting responsible dog ownership. We represent over 5,000 dog clubs nationally, including 10 clubs in Rhode Island. We are dedicated to ensuring the health and wellbeing of all dogs and to preserving each unique breed. The AKC and its affiliates are committed to ensuring that all dogs are kept in safe, humane environments, and offer many programs regarding humane care and treatment of dogs. We have raised over \$60 million for canine health research projects since 1995; donated over \$2 million to help local emergency management prepare for and provide disaster relief for people and their pets; and offer lost dog recovery services that has reunited over 500,000 dogs with their families. Moreover, we inspect thousands of kennels every year to ensure the safety and welfare of AKC-registered dogs.

The purpose of H. 7970 is to create a court procedure for pets in divorce and separation proceedings. The text of H. 7970 reflects AKC's collaborative work with Representative Lima that struck the word "custody" and inserted "possession or ownership" before the predecessor bill was passed by the House of Representatives in 2021. Long-standing legal traditions in the United States provide that pets are considered the legal property of their owners while benefiting from laws governing their care and treatment. This does not mean that pets are offered less care; rather, it provides a strong legal framework by which animal owners derive the *right and responsibility* to care for their animals in a manner that is best for them. ***Kindly ensure consistency prior to favorable release from committee this session by substituting the words "possession or ownership" for "custody" in line 14 and the newly proposed statutory title at line 3.***

Thank you for your consideration. If I can be of assistance to the committee, kindly contact me. I can be reached at (919) 816-3348 or Stacey.Ober@akc.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stacey A. Ober". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "S".

Stacey Ober, JD
Regional Manager, New England
AKC Government Relations

CC: Members of the House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Charlene M. Lima, H. 7970 Bill Sponsor