



March 11, 2024

Representative Stephen Casey, Chair  
House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing  
State of Rhode Island General Assembly  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Re: House Bill No. 2024-7840 - "AN ACT RELATING TO ANIMALS AND ANIMAL HUSBANDRY –  
REGULATION OF VICIOUS DOGS"

Dear Representative Casey:

I am writing on behalf of the Rhode Island Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RISPCA) with regard to House Bill No. 2024-7840 which is scheduled for consideration by the House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing at the Rise of the House on Tuesday, March 12, 2024. I sincerely appreciate the support we have received from Representatives Jon Brien, Patricia Serpa and Thomas Noret who have sponsored this bill.

I am proud of the ongoing work of the RISPCA, which has been protecting and caring for animals in Rhode Island since 1870. There are several provisions in Rhode Island law that require or allow the RISPCA to respond to animal welfare issues and, while we have been fulfilling those requirements for more than a century. The RISPCA participates in every vicious dog hearing held in Rhode Island and regularly works with State and Federal law enforcement when major cases involving animals are investigated including animal fighting cases and on a regular basis, hoarding cases. We do not receive any state or federal funding for our work.

The current version of RIGL §4-13.1-5 is problematic for the RISPCA for several reasons and I respectfully request that H-7840 be passed into law to address these issues. As an example, there now is a requirement that all vicious dogs are to be placed into the custody of the Rhode Island SPCA pending final disposition. Simply stated, we do not always have space available to accept a transfer of a dog into our facility. In addition to traditional shelter services, we provide a wide range of low and no-cost services that benefit low income families and individuals as well as the homeless, the disconnected and domestic violence victims. We have a no-cost hardship boarding program where we board pets of families and individuals who are losing their housing or are homeless and would not otherwise be able to secure shelter because they have a pet. Our shelter is often filled to capacity and currently is filled beyond its intended capacity and there is a long waiting list of people seeking hardship boarding services. The RISPCA can only offer its services on a space available basis and the current statutory language in RIGL §4-13.1-5 does not allow that flexibility.

Protecting and caring for animals since 1870

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In addition, dogs that have been declared vicious are often difficult to handle and can present dangers to our staff. The RISPCA should not be required to take an animal into its shelter that its trained shelter staff does not feel can be safely handled here. There are several municipal shelters in Rhode Island with well trained and effective animal control officers that can provide similar services as those that are required by RIGL §4-13.1-5. The RISPCA should not be mandated to perform services for the benefit of a municipality that that could otherwise be performed as effectively at the municipal level.

Finally, there is no provision in the current version of RIGL §4-13.1-5 that requires a municipality to reimburse the RISPCA for any services rendered. That omission currently presents a potentially severe operating challenge for the RISPCA.

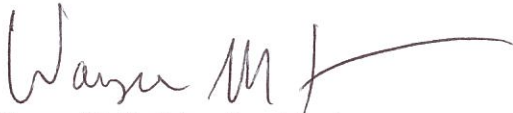
For the reasons set forth above, I respectfully request that the House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing Committee recommend the passage of H 24-7840 as presented.

Should you or any member of your committee have questions about the position presented above, please do not hesitate to contact me or the Rhode Island SPCA's lobbyist, George Zainyeh of the Athena Solutions Group.

If it is possible to do so at some time in the future, I would also appreciate an opportunity to address your committee with regard to the overlap between the animal welfare issues we deal with on a regular basis here at the RISPCA and their impact on the homeless community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wayne M. Kezirian", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Wayne M. Kezirian, President

By E-mail to: [HouseMunicipalGovernmentandHousing@rilegislature.gov](mailto:HouseMunicipalGovernmentandHousing@rilegislature.gov)  
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