



Memorandum in Support

COMMITTEE ON ANIMALS AND THE LAW

Animals #12-a

January 20, 2026

S.4952

By: Senator Harckham

A.798

By: M. of A. Rosenthal

Senate Committee: Education

Assembly Committee: Education

Effective Date: The first of July next succeeding the date on which it shall have become a law

AN ACT to amend the education law, in relation to expanding the requirements for teaching humane education to secondary school students and provides for the verification of compliance of such instruction.

LAW AND SECTIONS REFERRED TO: Subdivision 1 of section 809 of the Education Law.

THE COMMITTEE ON ANIMALS AND THE LAW SUPPORTS THIS LEGISLATION

This bill expands existing requirements for teaching humane treatment and protection of animals in elementary schools to require its inclusion in publicly funded secondary schools. It requires that every publicly funded secondary school provide curricula on the humane treatment and protection of animals; the importance animals play in the economy of nature; the necessity of controlling the proliferation of animals which are subsequently abandoned and caused to suffer extreme cruelty; principles of kindness to and respect for animals; and the observance of laws and rules pertaining to the humane treatment of animals. The bill requires that the Commissioner of Education determine how to incorporate such instruction into existing curricula and promulgate any regulations needed to carry out such a determination. It also requires that the Commissioner of Education maintain records verifying schools' compliance with the requirement of humane education in both primary and secondary schools and to make those records publicly available, including on the New York State Education Department's website.

Humane education is important to the well-rounded development of children, the next generation in our society, particularly given the widespread recognition that the way children are taught to treat animals often lays the groundwork for the way they will learn to interact with others and their environment more broadly. It teaches students lessons ranging from the importance of responsible pet ownership - thereby reducing overcrowding in shelters and companion animal euthanasia - to respect for our planet, which is critically important during this time of environmental crisis.¹ Humane education focuses on universal values of kindness, empathy, and

¹ IPCC, 2022, "Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability," Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts].

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the importance of treating all living things with respect and compassion.²

Studies have shown that incorporating humane education into school curricula has resulted in increased feelings of compassion, empathy, kindness, and respect for all forms of life.³ It is therefore especially important to extend New York's existing humane education requirement to secondary schools given the unprecedented amount of violence in America's schools today.⁴ Recent studies suggest that teens who abuse animals may be more likely to harm their peers at school.⁵ In fact, one study found that in an analysis of school shootings from 1988 to 2012, 43% of the perpetrators had committed acts of animal cruelty at some point prior to the event.⁶ Humane education fosters empathy and respect for life, which may reduce the likelihood that students commit violence against others, including their peers.

This bill also adds a requirement that the Commissioner of Education maintain records verifying schools' compliance with the law and make those records publicly available, including on the New York State Education Department's website. While New York has a long history of requiring humane education in public schools, many educators remain unaware of the requirement and do not incorporate it into their curricula.⁷ This bill includes an added layer of accountability and oversight that is critical to achieve the intent of this legislation, which has existed for over a century.⁸

Finally, it is important to note that this bill does not require New York educators to add another field of study to their curricula specific to humane education. This bill is written so that teachers can incorporate the principles of humane education into their existing core curriculum, including in science, mathematics, and language arts. Additionally, there are a plethora of free resources

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, 3056 pp., doi:10.1017/9781009325844 (estimating that, in the next decade alone, climate change will drive 32-132 million more people into extreme poverty).

² Lickona, Thomas, "Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility" (Bantam Books 1991).

³ Antoncic, Lydia S., "A New Era in Humane Education: How Troubling Youth Trends and a Call for Character Education Are Breathing New Life Into Efforts to Educate Our Youth About the Value of All Life", 9 ANIMAL L. 183 (2003) at 196.

⁴ "2024 saw the 2nd highest number of K-12 school shooting incidents" (January 7, 2025), Everytown for Gun Safety K-12 School Shooting Database, available at <https://k12ssdb.org/> (last viewed March 16, 2025).

⁵ Arluke A, Lankford A, Madfis E, "Harming animals and massacring humans: Characteristics of public mass and active shooters who abuse animals" BEHAV SCI LAW. 2018 Nov; 36(6):739-751; Levin, Marc, "We need to Talk about Mass Shootings and Animal Cruelty" TIME Magazine, (June 29, 2022), available at <https://time.com/6191947/mass-shootings-animal-cruelty/> (last viewed March 16, 2025).

⁶ Arluke, Arnold and Eric Madfis. "Animal Abuse as a Warning Sign of School Massacres." HOMICIDE STUDIES 18 (2014) at 22 - 27.

⁷ Id. at 210.

⁸ Laws of New York 1917, Chapter 210 (requiring all publicly funded elementary schools to give instruction in the 'humane treatment and protection of animals and birds and the role they play in the economy of nature.); Laws of New York 1976, Chapter 138 (amending existing humane education requirement to include instruction on "the necessity of controlling the proliferation of animals which are subsequently abandoned and caused to suffer extreme cruelty."); Laws of New York 1994, Chapter 542 (adding requirements relating to the study and care of live animals, dissection of animals, treatment of vertebrates).

for educators to utilize when building these lesson plans.

For the foregoing reasons, the Committee on Animals and the Law **SUPPORTS** the passage and enactment of this legislation.

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