

The National Agricultural
Law Center



University of Arkansas School of Law

An Agricultural Law Research Project

States' Animal Cruelty Statutes
State of Pennsylvania

www.NationalAgLawCenter.org



UNIVERSITY of ARKANSAS
SCHOOL of LAW

States' Animal Cruelty Statutes

STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

Current through Act 2010-28

18 Pa.C.S.A. § 5511 Cruelty to Animals

(a) Killing, maiming or poisoning domestic animals or zoo animals, etc.--

(1) A person commits a misdemeanor of the second degree if he willfully and maliciously:

(i) Kills, maims or disfigures any domestic animal of another person or any domestic fowl of another person.

(ii) Administers poison to or exposes any poisonous substance with the intent to administer such poison to any domestic animal of another person or domestic fowl of another person.

(iii) Harasses, annoys, injures, attempts to injure, molests or interferes with a dog guide for an individual who is blind, a hearing dog for an individual who is deaf or audibly impaired or a service dog for an individual who is physically limited.

Any person convicted of violating the provisions of this paragraph shall be sentenced to pay a fine of not less than \$500.

(2) A person commits a felony of the third degree if he willfully and maliciously:

(i) Kills, maims or disfigures any zoo animal in captivity.

(ii) Administers poison to or exposes any poisonous substance with the intent to administer such poison to any zoo animal in captivity.

(2.1) (i) A person commits a misdemeanor of the first degree if he willfully and maliciously:

(A) Kills, maims, mutilates, tortures or disfigures any dog or cat, whether belonging to himself or otherwise. If a person kills, maims, mutilates, tortures or disfigures a dog guide for an individual who is blind, a hearing dog for an individual who is deaf or audibly impaired or a service dog for an individual who is physically limited, whether belonging to the individual or otherwise, that person, in addition to any other applicable penalty, shall be required to make reparations for veterinary costs in treating the dog and, if necessary, the cost of obtaining and training a replacement dog.

(B) Administers poison to or exposes any poisonous substance with the intent to administer such poison to any dog or cat, whether belonging to himself or otherwise.

(ii) Any person convicted of violating the provisions of this paragraph shall be sentenced to pay a fine of not less than \$1,000 or to imprisonment for not more than two years, or both. The court may also order a presentence mental evaluation. A subsequent conviction under this paragraph shall be a felony of the third degree. This paragraph shall apply to dogs and cats only.

(iii) The killing of a dog or cat by the owner of that animal is not malicious if it is accomplished in accordance with the act of December 22, 1983 (P.L. 303, No. 83), [\[FN1\]](#) referred to as the Animal Destruction Method Authorization Law.

(3) This subsection shall not apply to:

(i) the killing of any animal taken or found in the act of actually destroying any domestic animal or domestic fowl;

(ii) the killing of any animal or fowl pursuant to the act of June 3, 1937 (P.L. 1225, No. 316), [\[FN2\]](#) known as The Game Law, or [34 Pa.C.S. §§ 2384](#) (relating to declaring dogs public nuisances) and 2385 (relating to destruction of dogs declared public nuisances), or the regulations promulgated thereunder; or

(iii) such reasonable activity as may be undertaken in connection with vermin control or pest control.

(b) Regulating certain actions concerning fowl or rabbits.--A person commits a summary offense if he sells, offers for sale, barter, or gives away baby chickens, ducklings, or other fowl, under one month of age, or rabbits under two months of age, as pets, toys, premiums or novelties or if he colors, dyes, stains or otherwise changes the natural color of baby chickens, ducklings or other fowl, or rabbits or if he brings or transports the same into this Commonwealth. This section shall not be construed to prohibit the sale or display of such baby chickens, ducklings, or other fowl, or such rabbits, in proper facilities by persons engaged in the business of selling them for purposes of commercial breeding and raising.

(c) Cruelty to animals.--

(1) A person commits an offense if he wantonly or cruelly illtreats, overloads, beats, otherwise abuses any animal, or neglects any animal as to which he has a duty of care, whether belonging to himself or otherwise, or abandons any animal, or deprives any animal of necessary sustenance, drink, shelter or veterinary care, or access to clean and sanitary shelter which will protect the animal against inclement weather and preserve the animal's body heat and keep it dry.

(2) (i) Except as provided in subparagraph (ii), a person convicted of violating paragraph (1) commits a summary offense.

(ii) A person convicted for a second or subsequent time of violating paragraph (1) commits a misdemeanor of the third degree if all of the following occurred:

(A) The action or omission for which the person was convicted for a subsequent time was performed on a dog or cat.

(B) The dog or cat was seriously injured, suffered severe physical distress or was placed at imminent risk of serious physical harm as the result of the person's action or omission.

(3) This subsection shall not apply to activity undertaken in normal agricultural operation.

(d) Selling or using disabled horse.--A person commits a summary offense if he offers for sale or sells any horse, which by reason of debility, disease or lameness, or for other cause, could not be worked or used without violating the laws against cruelty to animals, or leads, rides, drives or transports any such horse for any purpose, except that of conveying the horse to the nearest available appropriate facility for its humane keeping or destruction or for medical or surgical treatment.

(e) Transporting animals in cruel manner.--A person commits a summary offense if he carries, or causes, or allows to be carried in or upon any cart, or other vehicle whatsoever, any animal in a cruel or inhumane manner. The person taking him into custody may take charge of the animal and of any such vehicle and its contents, and deposit the same in some safe place of custody, and any necessary expenses which may be incurred for taking charge of and keeping the same, and sustaining any such animal, shall be a lien thereon, to be paid before the same can lawfully be recovered, or the said expenses or any part thereof remaining unpaid may be recovered by the person incurring the same from the owner of said creature in any action therefor.

For the purposes of this section, it shall not be deemed cruel or inhumane to transport live poultry in crates so long as not more than 15 pounds of live poultry are allocated to each cubic foot of space in the crate.

(e.1) Transporting equine animals in cruel manner.--Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a person commits a summary offense for each equine animal if the person carries, or causes or allows to be carried, any equine animal in or upon any conveyance or other vehicle whatsoever with two or more levels stacked on top of one another. A person who violates this subsection on a second or subsequent occasion commits a misdemeanor of the third degree for each equine animal transported.

(f) Hours of labor of animals.--A person commits a summary offense if he leads, drives, rides or works or causes or permits any other person to lead, drive, ride or work any horse, mare, mule, ox, or any other animal, whether belonging to himself or in his possession or control, for more than 15 hours in any 24 hour period, or more than 90 hours in any one week.

Nothing in this subsection contained shall be construed to warrant any persons leading, driving, riding or walking any animal a less period than 15 hours, when so doing shall in any way violate the laws against cruelty to animals.

(g) Cruelty to cow to enhance appearance of udder.--A person commits a summary offense if he kneads or beats or pads the udder of any cow, or willfully allows it to go unmilked for a period of 24 hours or more, for the purpose of enhancing the appearance or size of the udder of said cow, or by a muzzle or any other device prevents its calf, if less than six weeks old, from obtaining nourishment, and thereby relieving the udder of said cow, for a period of 24 hours.

(h) Specific violations; prima facie evidence of violation.--

(1)(i) A person commits a summary offense if the person crops, trims or cuts off, or causes or procures to be cropped, trimmed or cut off, the whole or part of the ear or ears of a dog.

(ii) The provisions of this paragraph shall not prevent a veterinarian from cropping, trimming or cutting off the whole or part of the ear or ears of a dog when the dog is anesthetized and shall not prevent any person from causing or procuring the cropping, trimming or cutting off of a dog's ear or ears by a veterinarian.

(iii) The possession by any person of a dog with an ear or ears cropped, trimmed or cut off and with the wound or incision site resulting therefrom unhealed, or any such dog being found in the charge or custody of any person or confined upon the premises owned by or under the control of any person, shall be prima facie evidence of a violation of this subsection by the person except as provided for in this subsection.

(iv) A person who procures the cropping, trimming or cutting off of the whole or part of an ear or ears of a dog shall record the procedure. The record shall include the name of the attending veterinarian and the date and location at which the procedure was performed. The record shall be kept as long as the wound or incision site is unhealed and shall be transferred with the dog during that period of time.

(2)(i) A person commits a summary offense if the person debarks a dog by cutting, causing or procuring the cutting of its vocal cords or by altering, causing or procuring the alteration of any part of its resonance chamber.

(ii) The provisions of this paragraph shall not prevent a veterinarian from cutting the vocal cords or otherwise altering the resonance chamber of a dog when the dog is anesthetized and shall not prevent a person from causing or procuring a debarking procedure by a veterinarian.

(iii) The possession by any person of a dog with the vocal cords cut or the resonance chamber otherwise altered and with the wound or incision site resulting therefrom unhealed, or any such dog being found in the charge or custody of any person or confined upon the premises owned by or under the control of any person, shall be prima facie evidence of a violation of this paragraph by the person, except as provided in this paragraph.

(iv) A person who procures the cutting of vocal cords or the alteration of the resonance chamber of a dog shall record the procedure. The record shall include the name of the attending veterinarian and the date and location at which the procedure was performed. The record shall be kept as long as the wound or incision site is unhealed and shall be transferred with the dog during that period of time.

(3)(i) A person commits a summary offense if the person docks, cuts off, causes or procures the docking or cutting off of the tail of a dog over five days old.

(ii) The provisions of this paragraph shall not prevent a veterinarian from docking, cutting off or cropping the whole or part of the tail of a dog when the dog is at least 12 weeks of age and the procedure is performed using general anesthesia and shall not prevent a person from causing or procuring the cutting off or docking of a tail of a dog by a veterinarian as provided in this paragraph.

(iii) The provisions of this section shall not prevent a veterinarian from surgically removing, docking, cutting off or cropping the tail of a dog between five days and 12 weeks of age if, in the veterinarian's professional judgment, the procedure is medically necessary for the health and welfare of the dog. If the procedure is performed, it shall be done in accordance with generally accepted standards of veterinary practice.

(iv) The possession by any person of a dog with a tail cut off or docked and with the wound or incision site resulting therefrom unhealed, or any such dog being found in the charge or custody of any person or confined upon the premises owned by or under the control of any person, shall be prima facie evidence of a violation of this paragraph by the person, except as provided in this paragraph.

(v) A person who procures the cutting off or docking of a tail of a dog shall record the procedure. The record shall include the name of the attending veterinarian and the date and location at which the procedure was performed. The record shall be kept as long as the wound or incision site is unhealed and shall be transferred with the dog during that period of time.

(4)(i) A person commits a summary offense if the person surgically births or causes or procures a surgical birth.

(ii) The provisions of this section shall not prevent a veterinarian from surgically birthing a dog when the dog is anesthetized and shall not prevent any person from causing or procuring a surgical birthing by a veterinarian.

(iii) The possession by any person of a dog with a wound or incision site resulting from a surgical birth unhealed, or any such dog being found in the charge or custody of any person or confined upon the premises owned by or under the control of any person, shall be prima facie evidence of a violation of this paragraph by the person, except as provided in this paragraph.

(iv) A person who procures the surgical birth of a dog shall record the procedure. The record shall include the name of the attending veterinarian and the date and location at which the procedure was performed. The record shall be kept as long as the wound or incision site is unhealed and shall be transferred with the dog during that period of time.

(v) This paragraph shall not apply to personnel required to comply with standards to minimize pain to an animal set forth in section 2143(a)(3) of the Animal Welfare Act (Public Law 89-544, § 2131 et seq.), trained in accordance with section 2143(d) of the Animal Welfare Act, who work in a federally registered research facility required to comply with the Animal Welfare Act under the guidance or oversight of a veterinarian.

(5)(i) A person commits a summary offense if the person cuts off or causes or procures the cutting off of the dewclaw of a dog over five days old.

(ii) The provisions of this paragraph shall not prevent a veterinarian from cutting the dewclaw and shall not prevent a person from causing or procuring the procedure by a veterinarian.

(iii) The possession by any person of a dog with the dewclaw cut off and with the wound or incision site resulting therefrom unhealed, or any such dog being found in the charge or custody of any person or confined upon the premises owned by or under the control of any person, shall be prima facie evidence of a violation of this paragraph by the person, except as provided in this paragraph.

(iv) A person who procures the cutting off of the dewclaw of a dog shall record the procedure. The record shall include the name of the attending veterinarian and the date and location at which the procedure was performed. The record shall be kept as long as the wound or incision site is unhealed and shall be transferred with the dog during that period of time.

(h.1) Animal fighting.--A person commits a felony of the third degree if he:

(1) for amusement or gain, causes, allows or permits any animal to engage in animal fighting;

(2) receives compensation for the admission of another person to any place kept or used for animal fighting;

- (3) owns, possesses, keeps, trains, promotes, purchases, steals or acquires in any manner or knowingly sells any animal for animal fighting;
- (4) in any way knowingly encourages, aids or assists therein;
- (5) wagers on the outcome of an animal fight;
- (6) pays for admission to an animal fight or attends an animal fight as a spectator; or
- (7) knowingly permits any place under his control or possession to be kept or used for animal fighting.

This subsection shall not apply to activity undertaken in a normal agricultural operation.

(i) Power to initiate criminal proceedings.--An agent of any society or association for the prevention of cruelty to animals, incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth, shall have the same powers to initiate criminal proceedings provided for police officers by the Pennsylvania Rules of Criminal Procedure. An agent of any society or association for the prevention of cruelty to animals, incorporated under the laws of this Commonwealth, shall have standing to request any court of competent jurisdiction to enjoin any violation of this section.

(j) Seizure of animals kept or used for animal fighting.--Any police officer or agent of a society or association for the prevention of cruelty to animals incorporated under the laws of this Commonwealth, shall have power to seize any animal kept, used, or intended to be used for animal fighting. When the seizure is made, the animal or animals so seized shall not be deemed absolutely forfeited, but shall be held by the officer or agent seizing the same until a conviction of some person is first obtained for a violation of subsection (h.1). The officer or agent making such seizure shall make due return to the issuing authority, of the number and kind of animals or creatures so seized by him. Where an animal is thus seized, the police officer or agent is authorized to provide such care as is reasonably necessary, and where any animal thus seized is found to be disabled, injured or diseased beyond reasonable hope of recovery, the police officer or agent is authorized to provide for the humane destruction of the animal. In addition to any other penalty provided by law, the authority imposing sentence upon a conviction for any violation of subsection (h.1) shall order the forfeiture or surrender of any abused, neglected or deprived animal of the defendant to any society or association for the prevention of cruelty to animals duly incorporated under the laws of this Commonwealth and shall require that the owner pay the cost of the keeping, care and destruction of the animal.

(k) Killing homing pigeons.--A person commits a summary offense if he shoots, maims or kills any antwerp or homing pigeon, either while on flight or at rest, or detains or entraps any such pigeon which carries the name of its owner.

(l) Search warrants.--Where a violation of this section is alleged, any issuing authority may, in compliance with the applicable provisions of the Pennsylvania Rules of Criminal Procedure, issue to any police officer or any agent of any society or association for the prevention of cruelty to animals duly incorporated under the laws of this Commonwealth a search warrant authorizing the search of any building or any enclosure in which any violation of this section is occurring or has occurred, and authorizing the seizure of evidence of the violation including, but not limited to, the animals which were the subject of the violation. Where an animal thus seized is found to be neglected or starving, the police officer or agent is authorized to provide such care as is reasonably necessary, and where any animal thus seized is found to be disabled, injured or diseased beyond reasonable hope of recovery, the police officer or agent is authorized to provide for the humane destruction of the animal. The cost of the keeping, care and destruction of the animal shall be paid by the owner thereof and claims for the costs shall constitute a lien upon the animal. In addition to any other penalty provided by law, the authority imposing sentence upon a conviction for any violation of this section may require that the owner pay the cost of the keeping, care and destruction of the animal. No search warrant shall be issued based upon an alleged violation of this section which authorizes any police officer or agent or

other person to enter upon or search premises where scientific research work is being conducted by, or under the supervision of, graduates of duly accredited scientific schools or where biological products are being produced for the care or prevention of disease.

(m) Forfeiture.--In addition to any other penalty provided by law, the authority imposing sentence upon a conviction for any violation of this section may order the forfeiture or surrender of any abused, neglected or deprived animal of the defendant to any society or association for the prevention of cruelty to animals duly incorporated under the laws of this Commonwealth.

(m.1) Fine for summary offense.--In addition to any other penalty provided by law, a person convicted of a summary offense under this section shall pay a fine of not less than \$50 nor more than \$750 or to imprisonment for not more than 90 days, or both.

(m.2) Prohibition of ownership.--Notwithstanding any provision of law and in addition to any other penalty provided by law, the authority imposing sentence upon a conviction for any violation of this section may order the prohibition or limitation of the defendant's ownership, possession, control or custody of animals or employment with the care of animals for a period of time not to exceed the statutory maximum term of imprisonment applicable to the offense for which sentence is being imposed.

(n) Skinning of and selling or buying pelts of dogs and cats.--A person commits a summary offense if he skins a dog or cat or offers for sale or exchange or offers to buy or exchange the pelt or pelts of any dog or cat.

(o) Representation of humane society by attorney.--Upon prior authorization and approval by the district attorney of the county in which the proceeding is held, an association or agent may be represented in any proceeding under this section by any attorney admitted to practice before the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and in good standing. Attorney's fees shall be borne by the humane society or association which is represented.

(o.1) Construction of section.--The provisions of this section shall not supersede the act of December 7, 1982 (P.L. 784, No. 225), [\[FN3\]](#) known as the Dog Law.

(p) Applicability of section.--This section shall not apply to, interfere with or hinder any activity which is authorized or permitted pursuant to the act of June 3, 1937 (P.L.1225, No. 316), known as The Game Law or Title 34 (relating to game).

(q) Definitions.--As used in this section, the following words and phrases shall have the meanings given to them in this subsection:

"Animal fighting." Fighting or baiting any bull, bear, dog, cock or other creature.

"Audibly impaired." The inability to hear air conduction thresholds at an average of 40 decibels or greater in the better ear.

"Blind." Having a visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with correction or having a limitation of the field of vision such that the widest diameter of the visual field subtends an angular distance not greater than 20 degrees.

"Conveyance." A truck, tractor, trailer or semitrailer, or any combination of these, propelled or drawn by mechanical power.

"Deaf." Totally impaired hearing or hearing with or without amplification which is so seriously impaired that the primary means of receiving spoken language is through other sensory input, including, but not limited to, lip reading, sign language, finger spelling or reading.

“Domestic animal.” Any dog, cat, equine animal, bovine animal, sheep, goat or porcine animal.

“Domestic fowl.” Any avis raised for food, hobby or sport.

“Equine animal.” Any member of the Equidae family, which includes horses, asses, mules, ponies and zebras.

“Normal agricultural operation.” Normal activities, practices and procedures that farmers adopt, use or engage in year after year in the production and preparation for market of poultry, livestock and their products in the production and harvesting of agricultural, agronomic, horticultural, silvicultural and aquicultural crops and commodities.

“Physically limited.” Having limited ambulation, including, but not limited to, a temporary or permanent impairment or condition that causes an individual to use a wheelchair or walk with difficulty or insecurity, affects sight or hearing to the extent that an individual is insecure or exposed to danger, causes faulty coordination or reduces mobility, flexibility, coordination or perceptiveness.

“Zoo animal.” Any member of the class of mammalia, aves, amphibia or reptilia which is kept in a confined area by a public body or private individual for purposes of observation by the general public.