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**HOUSE BILL 2644**

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**State of Washington 64th Legislature 2016 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Blake, Muri, Van De Wege, Jinkins, Kretz, Short, Fitzgibbon, Rossetti, and McBride

AN ACT Relating to animal forfeiture in animal cruelty cases; amending RCW 16.52.085 and 16.52.200; and repealing RCW 60.56.025.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**Sec.**  RCW 16.52.085 and 2011 c 172 s 3 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) If a law enforcement officer or animal control officer has probable cause to believe that an owner of a domestic animal has violated this chapter or a person owns, cares for, or resides with an animal in violation of an order issued under RCW 16.52.200(4) and no responsible person can be found to assume the animal's care, the officer may authorize, with a warrant, the removal of the animal to a suitable place for feeding and care, or may place the animal under the custody of an animal care and control agency. In determining what is a suitable place, the officer shall consider the animal's needs, including its size and behavioral characteristics. An officer may remove an animal under this subsection without a warrant only if the animal is in an immediate life-threatening condition.

(2) If a law enforcement officer or an animal control officer has probable cause to believe a violation of this chapter has occurred, the officer may authorize an examination of a domestic animal allegedly neglected or abused in violation of this chapter by a veterinarian to determine whether the level of neglect or abuse in violation of this chapter is sufficient to require removal of the animal. This section does not condone illegal entry onto private property.

(3) Any owner whose domestic animal is removed pursuant to this chapter shall be given written notice of the circumstances of the removal and notice of legal remedies available to the owner. The notice shall be given by posting at the place of seizure, by delivery to a person residing at the place of seizure, or by registered mail if the owner is known. In making the decision to remove an animal pursuant to this chapter, the officer shall make a good faith effort to contact the animal's owner before removal.

(4) The agency having custody of the animal may euthanize the animal or may find a responsible person to adopt the animal not less than fifteen ((~~business~~)) calendar days after the animal is taken into custody. A custodial agency may euthanize severely injured, diseased, or suffering animals at any time. An owner may prevent the animal's destruction or adoption by: (a) Petitioning the district court of the county where the animal was seized for the animal's immediate return subject to court-imposed conditions, or (b) posting a bond or security in an amount sufficient to provide for the animal's care for a minimum of thirty days from the seizure date. If the custodial agency still has custody of the animal when the bond or security expires, the animal shall become the agency's property unless the court orders an alternative disposition. If a court order prevents the agency from assuming ownership and the agency continues to care for the animal, the court shall order the owner to post or renew a bond or security for the agency's continuing costs for the animal's care. When a court has prohibited the owner from owning, caring for, or residing with a similar animal under RCW 16.52.200(4), the agency having custody of the animal may assume ownership upon seizure and the owner may not prevent the animal's destruction or adoption by petitioning the court or posting a bond.

(5) If no criminal case is filed within fourteen ((~~business~~)) calendar days of the animal's removal, the owner may petition the district court of the county where the animal was removed for the animal's return. The petition shall be filed with the court((~~, with~~)). Copies of the petition must be served ((~~to~~)) on the law enforcement or animal care and control agency responsible for removing the animal and to the prosecuting attorney on the same day that the petition is filed with the court. If the court grants the petition, the agency which seized the animal must ((~~deliver~~)) surrender the animal to the owner at no cost to the owner. If a criminal action is filed after the petition is filed but before the ((~~animal is returned,~~)) hearing on the petition, then the petition shall be joined with the criminal matter.

(6) In a motion or petition for the animal's return before a trial, the burden is on the owner to prove by a preponderance of the evidence that the animal will not suffer future neglect or abuse and is not in need of being restored to health.

(7) Any authorized person treating or attempting to restore an animal to health under this chapter shall not be civilly or criminally liable for such action.

**Sec.**  RCW 16.52.200 and 2011 c 172 s 4 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The sentence imposed for a misdemeanor or gross misdemeanor violation of this chapter may be deferred or suspended in accordance with RCW 3.66.067 and 3.66.068, however the probationary period shall be two years.

(2) In case of multiple misdemeanor or gross misdemeanor convictions, the sentences shall be consecutive, however the probationary period shall remain two years.

(3) In addition to the penalties imposed by the court, the court shall order the forfeiture of all animals held by law enforcement or animal care and control authorities under the provisions of this chapter if any one of the animals involved dies as a result of a violation of this chapter or if the defendant has a prior conviction under this chapter. In other cases the court may enter an order requiring the owner to forfeit the animal if the court deems the animal's treatment to have been severe and likely to reoccur.

(4) Any person convicted of animal cruelty shall be prohibited from owning, caring for, or residing with any similar animals for a period of time as follows:

(a) Two years for a first conviction of animal cruelty in the second degree under RCW 16.52.207;

(b) Permanently for a first conviction of animal cruelty in the first degree under RCW 16.52.205;

(c) Permanently for a second or subsequent conviction of animal cruelty, except as provided in subsection (5) of this section.

(5) If a person has no more than two convictions of animal cruelty and each conviction is for animal cruelty in the second degree, the person may petition the sentencing court in which the most recent animal cruelty conviction occurred, for a restoration of the right to own or possess a similar animal five years after the date of the second conviction. In determining whether to grant the petition, the court shall consider, but not be limited to, the following:

(a) The person's prior animal cruelty in the second degree convictions;

(b) The type of harm or violence inflicted upon the animals;

(c) Whether the person has completed the conditions imposed by the court as a result of the underlying convictions;

(d) Whether the person complied with the prohibition on owning, caring for, or residing with similar animals; and

(e) Any other matters the court finds reasonable and material to consider in determining whether the person is likely to abuse another animal.

The court may delay its decision on forfeiture under subsection (3) of this section until the end of the probationary period.

(6) In addition to fines and court costs, the defendant, only if convicted or in agreement, shall be liable for reasonable costs incurred pursuant to this chapter by law enforcement agencies, animal care and control agencies, or authorized private or public entities involved with the care of the animals. Reasonable costs include expenses of the investigation, and the animal's care, euthanization, or adoption.

(7) If convicted, the defendant shall also pay a civil penalty of one thousand dollars to the county to prevent cruelty to animals. These funds shall be used to prosecute offenses under this chapter and to care for forfeited animals pending trial.

(8) If a person violates the prohibition on owning, caring for, or residing with similar animals under subsection (4) of this section, that person:

(a) Shall pay a civil penalty of one thousand dollars for the first violation;

(b) Shall pay a civil penalty of two thousand five hundred dollars for the second violation; and

(c) Is guilty of a gross misdemeanor for the third and each subsequent violation.

(9) As a condition of the sentence imposed under this chapter or RCW 9.08.070 through 9.08.078, the court may also order the defendant to participate in an available animal cruelty prevention or education program or obtain available psychological counseling to treat mental health problems contributing to the violation's commission. The defendant shall bear the costs of the program or treatment.

(10) Nothing in this section limits the authority of a law enforcement officer, animal control officer, custodial agency, or court to remove, adopt, euthanize, or require forfeiture of an animal under RCW 16.52.085.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  RCW 60.56.025 (Lien created for care of animal seized by law enforcement officer) and 1987 c 233 s 2 are each repealed.

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