Desmond's Army Animal Law Advocates, the Passage of Desmond's Law in Connecticut and Analysis of Animal Cruelty Cases and Attorney Advocate Appointments from 2016-2025

Part I: Desmond's Army Animal Law Advocates

In a system where animals are categorized as property under the law rather than sentient beings, Desmond's Army Animal Law Advocates has emerged as a tireless voice for justice. Motivated by the tragic death of an animal victim, the organization effectuated statewide change resulting in groundbreaking legislation called Desmond's Law, allowing animal victims a voice in the courtroom.[1]

This section is the story behind Desmond's Army Animal Law Advocates and their continued work. Part II provides the results of the analysis of Desmond's Army's database of all animal cruelty cases since Desmond's Law was passed in 2016. Part III provides case examples where attorney advocates were appointed in cruelty cases. Part IV sets forth a path to strengthen Desmond's Law and allow all animal victims to have a voice while being an example to other jurisdictions contemplating similar legislation.

The Origins of a Movement

Justice for Desmond was the original group that initiated the movement leading to Desmond's Law. Desmond, a boxer mix, was a victim of domestic violence. After his pregnant owner left her abuser, Alex Wullaert, he retaliated by starving then strangling Desmond to death.[2] Desmond's body was later found in a garbage bag near a pond, and Wullaert confessed to the murder.[3]

During court proceedings, Wullaert engaged in "judge shopping" by strategically waiting for a sympathetic judge. Ultimately, he was awarded Accelerated Rehabilitation (AR), a program that would expunge his record after two years of compliance. He served no jail time.[4] The decision shocked and outraged the community in Connecticut.

While some supporters left the group after the verdict, a core group remained, determined to enact systemic change. This group contacted then-State Representative Diana Urban. A co-founder asked whether a law allowing a type of victim advocate for animals in cruelty cases could pass. Urban stated that the idea was crazy enough that it just might work.

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[1] CT Gen Statute section 54-86n.

[2] The contents of Desmond's stomach showed toilet paper and a piece of a plastic bag.

[3] https://www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/local/branford-man-accused-of-killing-pit-bull/1928345/.

[4] https://www.nhregister.com/connecticut/article/Ex-Branford-man-avoids-jail-time-in-dog-killing-11430574.php.

Grassroots Movement Leads to Groundbreaking Legislation

It took three years of advocating, legislative sessions, revisions, and public testimony. Supporters rallied at the capitol in Hartford, joined by animal control officers, rescue groups, media allies, and citizens who believed animals deserved better.

A significant part of the advocacy for Desmond's Law was Desmond's case: ***State of Connecticut v. Alex Wullaert***.[5] Legislators and the public were made aware of the facts, including the systematic cruelty inflicted on an innocent animal and the indisputable connection to domestic violence.

[5] https://www.nhregister.com/connecticut/article/Ex-Branford-man-avoids-jail-time-in-dog-killing-11430574.php; https://patch.com/connecticut/newcanaan/bp--not-just-a-dog-the-justice-for-desmond-campaign

Other cases that were highlighted included ***State of Connecticut v. Veronica Iris Reyes***[6]: (H17B-CR16-0063496-S). In January 2016, Veronica Reyes of Bristol, Connecticut, was charged with hanging two dogs from a tree in her yard. This egregious act drew additional public attention and illustrated the urgent need for legal advocacy on behalf of animal victims. Reyes pled guilty and was sentenced to 5 years, execution suspended after 6 months, with 3 years' probation.[7]

October 1, 2016, Desmond's Law goes into effect[8]

Desmond's Law allows courts to appoint volunteer attorneys or supervised law students to speak on behalf of animal victims in cruelty cases. These advocates review documentation, obtain records, visit the victims, collaborate with stakeholders, present facts, and ensure that the court

[6] State of Connecticut v. Veronica Iris Reyes, H17B-CR16-0063496-S.
[7] https://www.jud.ct.gov/crim.htm.
[8] Connecticut General Statute section 54-86n (2016) sets forth:

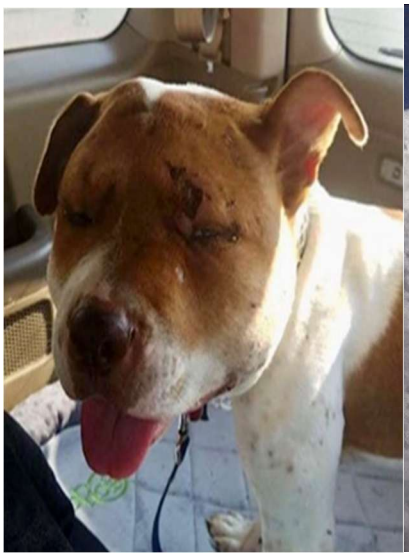
(a) In any prosecution under section 53-247, or in any court proceeding pursuant to section 22-329a or in the criminal session of the Superior Court regarding the welfare or custody of a cat or dog, the court may order, upon its own initiative or upon request of a party or counsel for a party, that a separate advocate be appointed to represent the interests of justice. If a court orders that an advocate be appointed to represent the interests of justice, the court shall appoint such advocate from a list provided to the court by the Commissioner of Agriculture pursuant to subsection (c) of this section. A decision by the court denying a request to appoint a separate advocate to represent the interests of justice shall not be subject to appeal.

(b) The advocate may: (1) monitor the case; (2) consult any individual with information that could aid the judge or fact finder and review records relating to the condition of the cat or dog and the defendant's actions, including, but not limited to, records from animal control officers, veterinarians and police officers; (3) attend hearings; and (4) present information or recommendations to the court pertinent to determinations that relate to the interests of justice, provided such information and recommendations shall be based solely upon the duties undertaken pursuant to this subsection.

(c) The Department of Agriculture shall maintain a list of attorneys with knowledge of animal issues and the legal system and a list of law schools that have students, or anticipate having students, with an interest in animal issues and the legal system. Such attorneys and law students shall be eligible to serve on a voluntary basis as advocates under this section. The provisions of sections 3-14 to 3-21, inclusive, of the Connecticut Practice Book shall govern a law student's participation as an advocate under this section.

considers the animal's interests. It was the first law of its kind in the United States and marked a new era in animal law and the protection of victims.

As soon as Desmond's Law took effect Desmond's Army began tracking animal cruelty cases in Connecticut and continues to do so today. One of the first cases tracked after the law was ***State of Connecticut v. Joe Irizarry***[9]***.*** Irizarry was arrested for severely beating a four-month-old puppy named Autumn. The animal was used as a tool to manipulate his girlfriend to remain in an abusive relationship. Initially charged as a misdemeanor, the offense was upgraded to a felony with the application of Desmond's Law.[10] Irizarry was ultimately sentenced to three years in prison. Autumn survived and was adopted into a loving home.




Desmond's Army Today

The organization continues its work through courtroom monitoring, legislative reform, and community outreach. It is dedicated to raising awareness on the link between animal cruelty and interpersonal violence, advocating for stronger laws, supporting enforcement, and educating the public about animal cruelty's connection to human violence. Desmond's Army tracks all animal cruelty cases in the state, notifies approved advocates of cases, attends court proceedings, and provides municipalities with funding for necropsies that aid in prosecution. It also contributes to medical expenses for victims of cruelty during open investigations and offers rewards for information leading to the arrest and conviction of individuals responsible for abandonment or cruelty. Its newest initiative covers the first month's boarding cost for pets of domestic violence victims entering a licensed safe house facility, removing a significant barrier for survivors trying to escape abusive situations.

[9] State of Connecticut v. Joe Irizarry, U04W-CR16-0441085-S.
[10] https://www.jud.ct.gov/crim.htm.

Desmond's Army advocates for the expansion of Desmond's Law to include all companion animals. The organization also supports legislation that imposes stronger penalties, permits lifetime bans on animal ownership for certain convicted abusers, and increases the presence of court-appointed animal advocates. Desmond's Army recognizes that some cases can be resolved through counseling, fines, or rehabilitation while others demand a prison sentence. Nonetheless, the organization insists that no instance of cruelty should go unrecognized or unchallenged.

Since its founding, Desmond's Army has grown exponentially. The organization's court accountability program ensures a respectful and consistent presence in courtrooms.[11] A strict courtroom code of conduct is upheld, ensuring all members remain professional and composed. The presence of purple-clad volunteers serves as a quiet but powerful reminder that animal victims matter. The work of Desmond's Army has been recognized by local, national and worldwide organizations. Their awards include 2019 SEEDS Award - International Society for Animal Rights, 2020 Mark Twain Excellence of Service Award, 2024 Connecticut Bar Association Citizen For The Law Award and 2020 and 2025 STARS Friends Of Animals Award.[12]

Part II: Desmond's Army Animal Law Advocates Data Analysis 2016-2025[13]

Since Desmond's Law went into effect Desmond's Army has collected data on all animal cruelty cases in Connecticut. Recently that data was analyzed for several reasons. First, no other organization or agency has tracked these cases in their entirety. Second, to decipher the total number of cases, type of charges, and type of crimes making up those charges. Third, to analyze the effect of attorney advocates assigned to cases in Connecticut.

To date, nothing published on Desmond's Law has laid out the total number of cases where attorney advocates have been appointed, whether they are private pro bono attorneys or through UConn law school and the impact attorney advocates have on cases. This data is pertinent to the effectiveness of the law, helps ascertain areas for improvement and is vital for other jurisdictions interested in passing similar legislation.

[11] https://www.desmondsarmy.org/copy-of-contact.
[12] https://www.desmondsarmy.org/.
[13] All data analyzed was sourced from records kept, maintained and confirmed by Desmond's Army Animal Law Advocates. That data is derived from court records, documents obtained through Freedom of Information laws and records from open court appearances. Data was analyzed from October 2016-June 2025.

Unless otherwise noted, this analysis covers 533 animal cruelty cases brought in the state of Connecticut from October 2016-June 2025.

The charts below contain details of the analysis. A few highlighted results are:

Crime/Case Specific Data

Charging

- 85.8% of cases were charged as misdemeanors
- 12.3% of cases were charged as felonies
- 36.5 % of all crimes were violent[14]
- 68.8% of violent crimes were charged as misdemeanors
- 60% of animal victims were dogs and cats

Prior Criminal Record/Charged with Additional Crimes/Violation of Probation[15]

- 32.1% of those charged with animal cruelty had a prior criminal record
- 52.3% of those charged with felony charges had a prior criminal record
- 24.8% of those charged with neglect had a prior criminal record

Link to Domestic violence[16]

- 16.3% of animal cruelty cases also involved domestic violence
- 38.9% of cases charged as a felony involved domestic violence
- 79.8% of violent crimes involved domestic violence

Attorney Advocate Specific Data

Advocate Appointments

- 171 advocates appointed
  - 89 pro bono private attorneys
  - 82 UConn law clinic

Advocates on Felony Cases

- 33 Felony cases had attorney advocates appointed
  - 23 pro bono private attorneys
  - 10 UConn law clinic

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[14] Violent crimes include death, disfigurement, torture, loss of limb, loss of eye/sight, prolonged abuse.

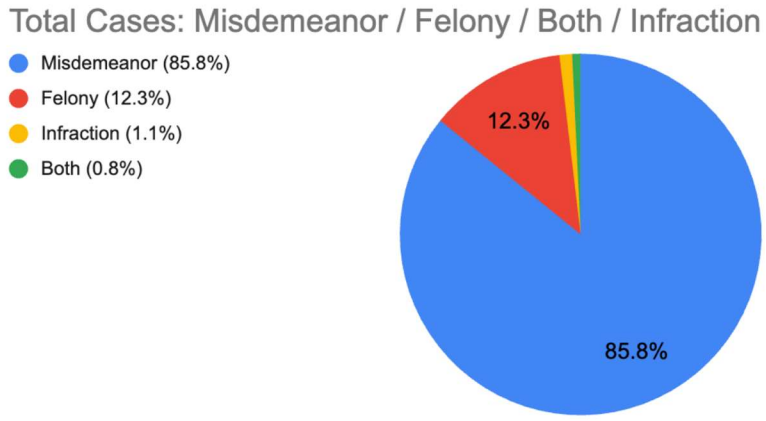
[15] Due to the common granting of Accelerated Rehabilitation under CT Gen Statute section 54-56e these results are believed to be lower than the actual numbers because AR files are sealed and then erased so recidivism is difficult to track.

[16] Domestic violence involved intimate partners, children, elderly, and cases involving strangulation of another. The cases analyzed were October 2016-October 2025 where domestic violence is noted in conjunction with animal cruelty for charges for that case. The statistics do not account for prior domestic violence incidents including prior cases by CT Department of Children and Family Services.

Increased Charges/Jail Sentence/Nolle

•9 of 33 felony cases *with* an attorney advocate resulted from increased charges
• 1 of 23 felony cases *without* an attorney advocate resulted from increased charges
•63% of felony cases *with* an attorney advocate assigned resulted in a jail sentence
•25% of felony cases *without* an attorney advocate resulted in a jail sentence
•2.6% of cases *with* an attorney advocate disposed of with a nolle.
•8.4% of cases *without* an attorney advocate disposed of with a nolle.

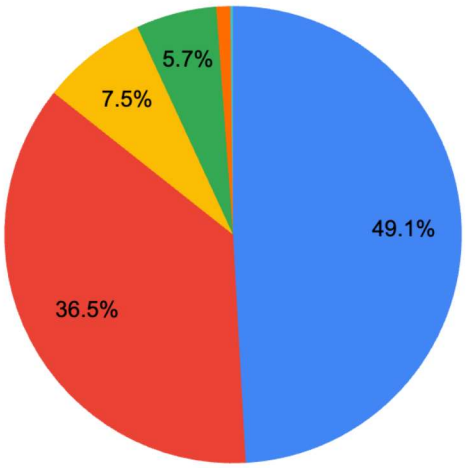
Charts for Types of Charges/Crimes



Type of Crime

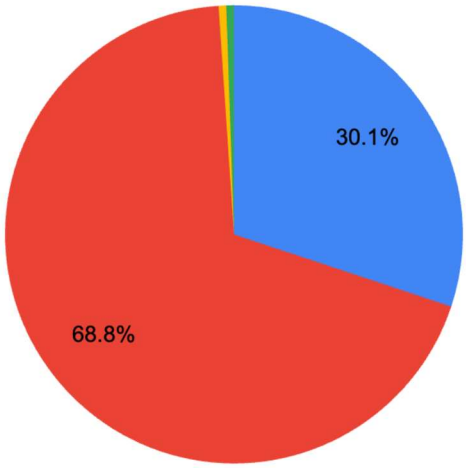
*24 cases have no indication about type of crime.

- Neglect (49.1%)
- Violent (36.5%)
- Abandonment (7.5%)
- Hoarding (5.7%)
- BYB (1.0%)
- Sexual Contact (0.2%)

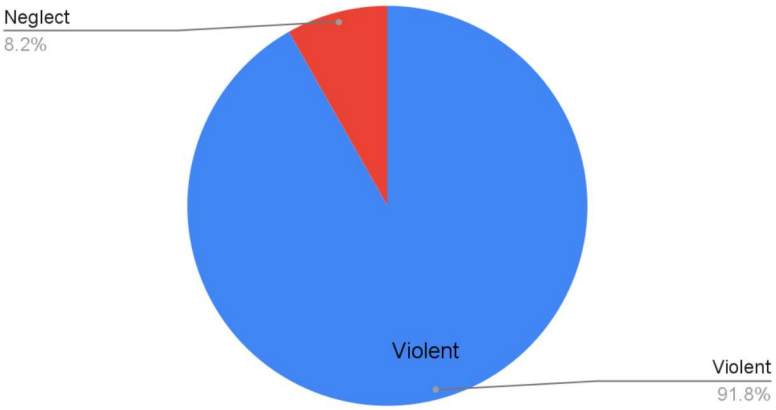


Violent Cases: Misdemeanor / Felony / Both / Infraction

- Felony (30.1%)
- Misdemeanor (68.8%)
- Infraction (0.5%)
- Both (0.5%)

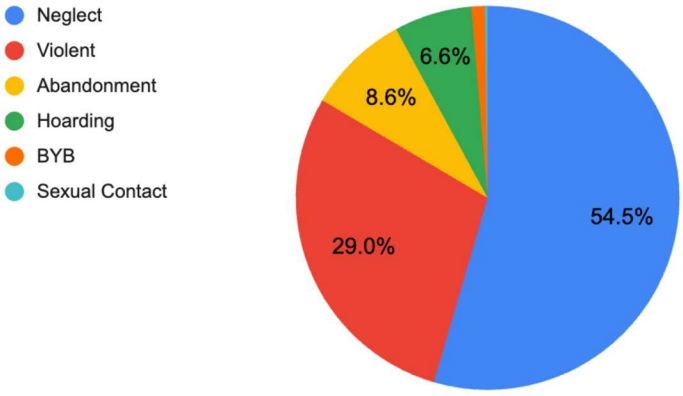


Felony: Type of Crime

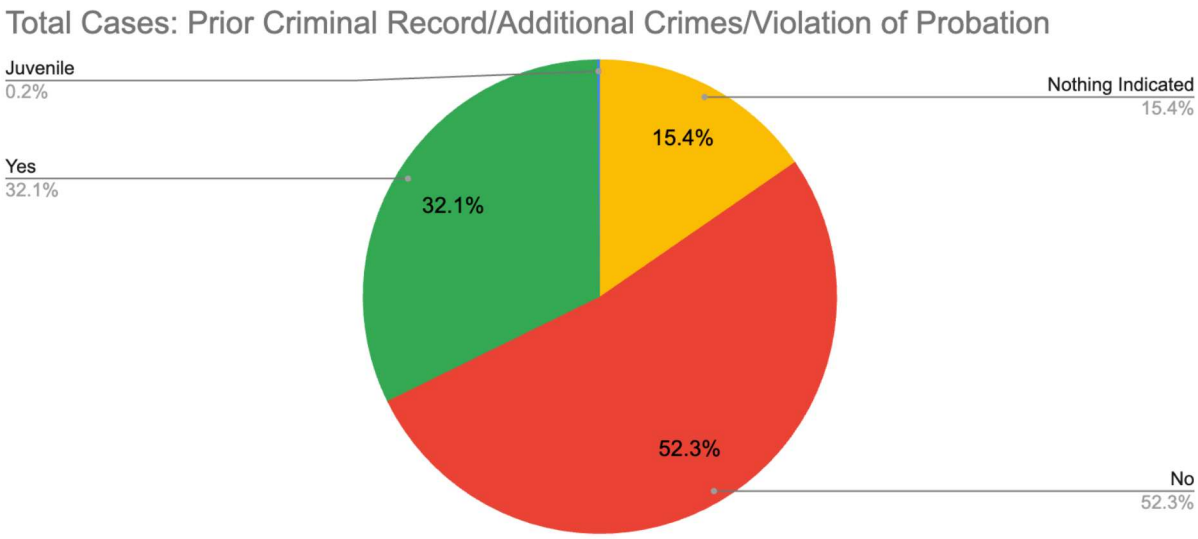


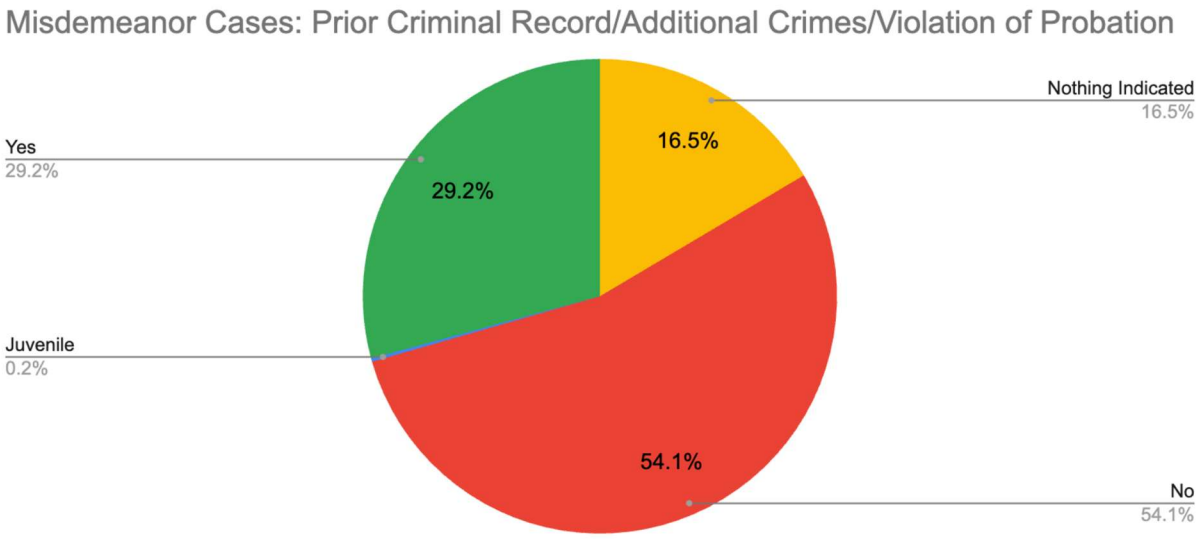
Misdemeanor: Type of Crime

*13 misdemeanor cases have no indication about type of crime.

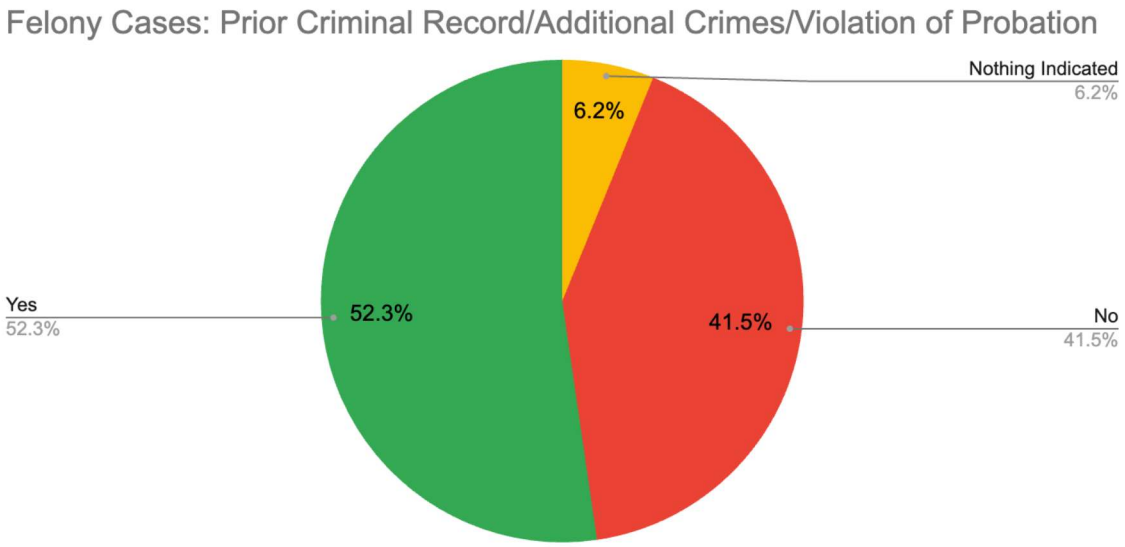


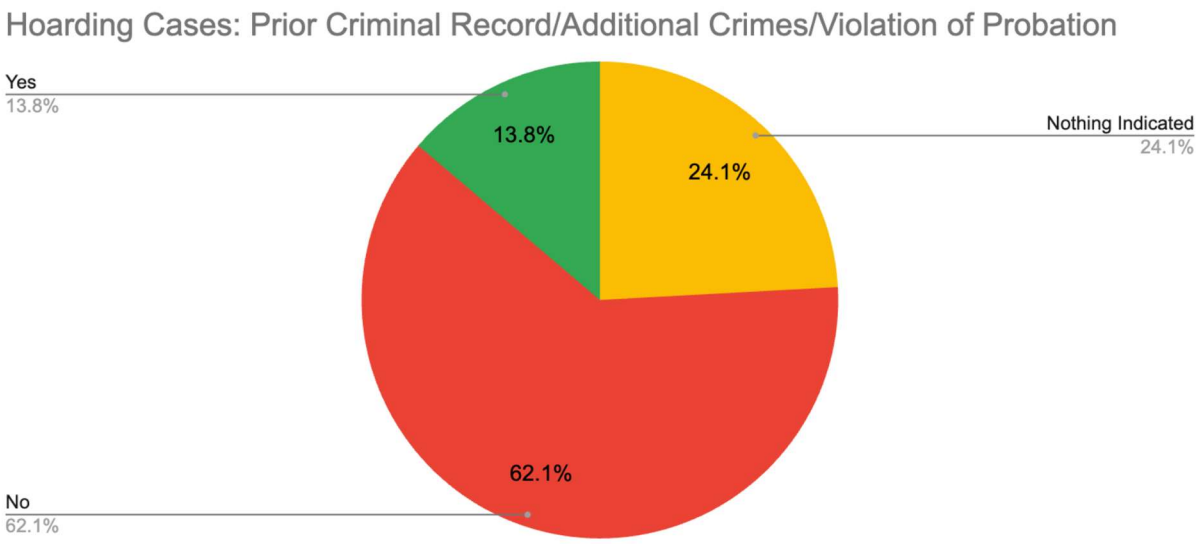
Charts for Prior Criminal Record[17]

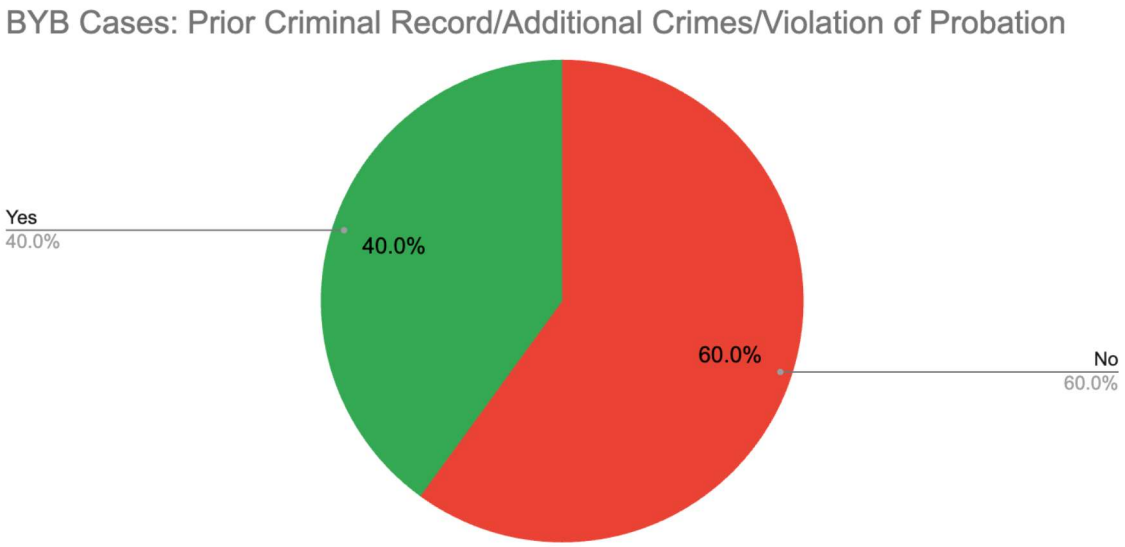


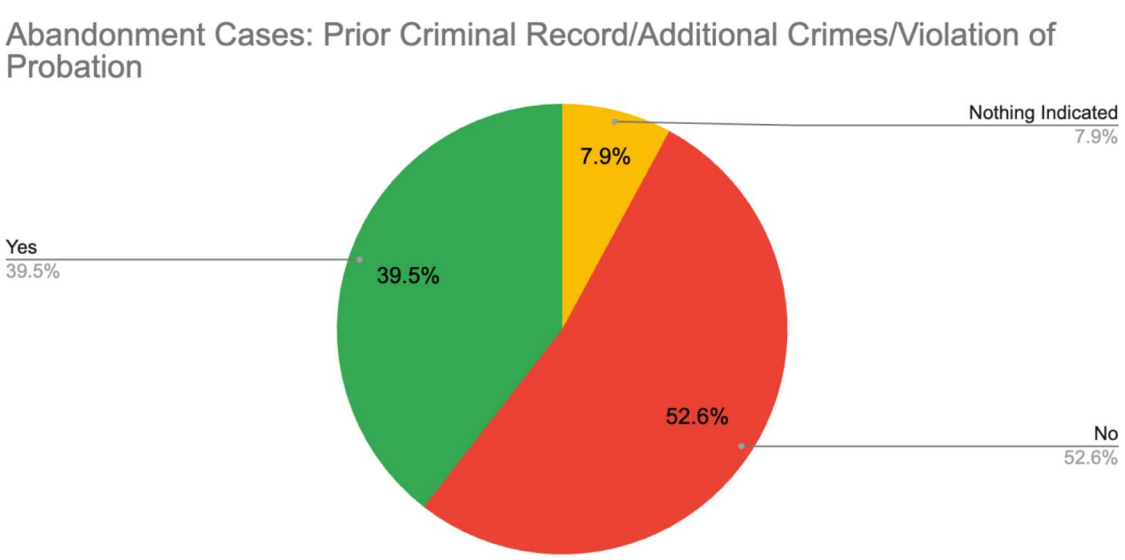


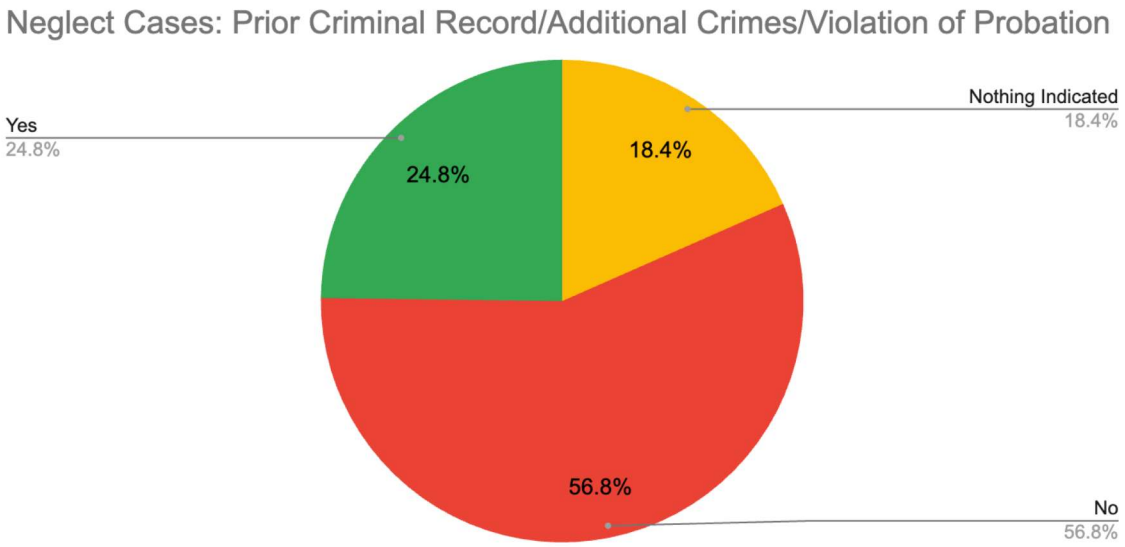
[17] Due to the common granting of Accelerated Rehabilitation under CT Gen Statute section 54-56e these results are believed to be lower than the actual numbers. This is because AR files are sealed and then erased so recidivism is difficult to track.

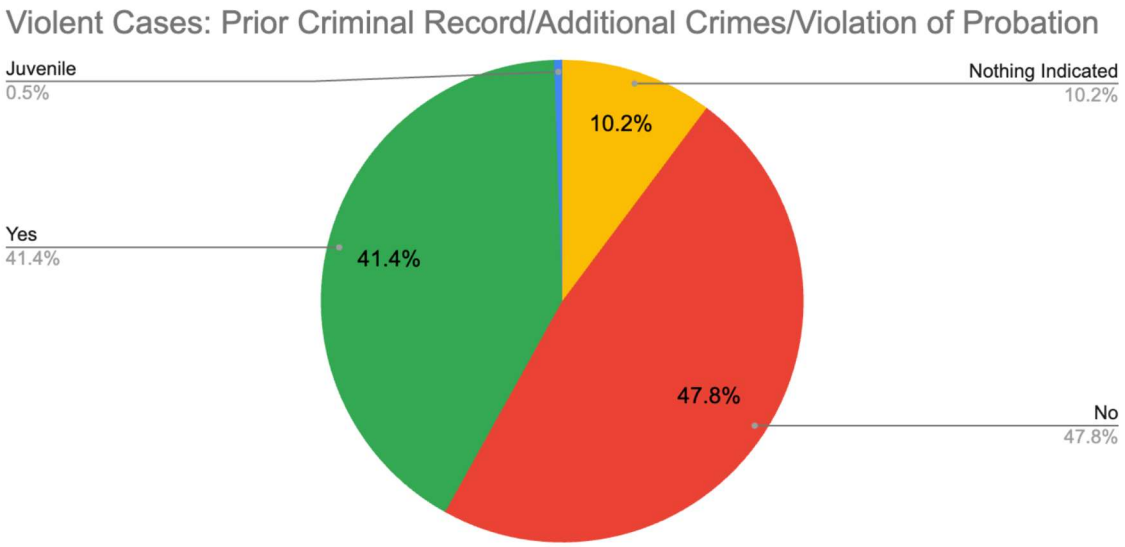

Felony Cases: Prior Criminal Record/Additional Crimes/Violation of Probation
Nothing Indicated
6.2%
6.2%
Yes
52.3%
52.3%
41.5%
No
41.5%


Hoarding Cases: Prior Criminal Record/Additional Crimes/Violation of Probation
Yes
13.8%
13.8%
Nothing Indicated
24.1%
24.1%
62.1%
No
62.1%

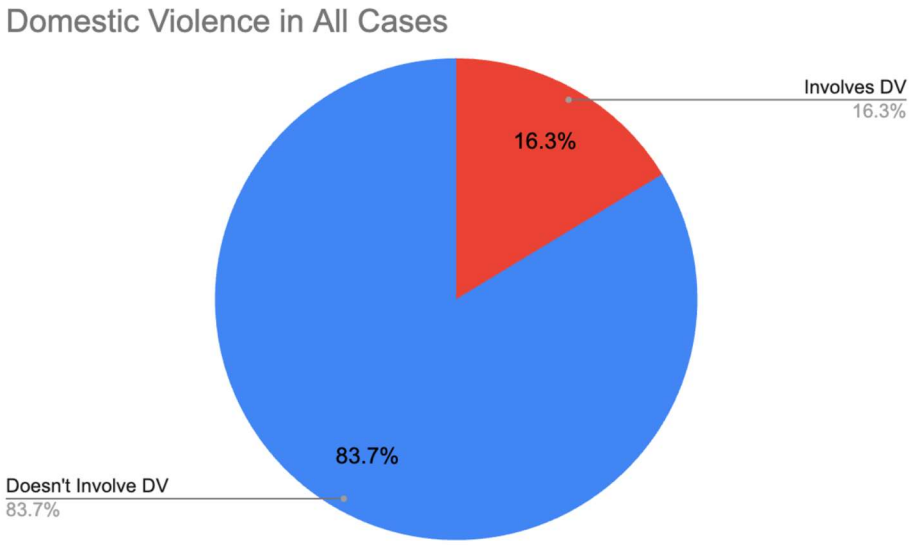

BYB Cases: Prior Criminal Record/Additional Crimes/Violation of Probation
Yes
40.0%
40.0%
60.0%
No
60.0%

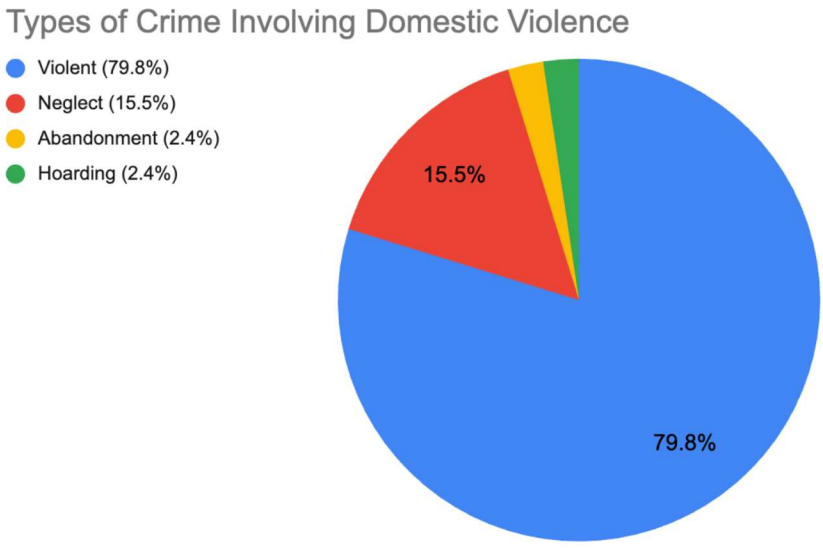

Abandonment Cases: Prior Criminal Record/Additional Crimes/Violation of Probation
Nothing Indicated
7.9%
7.9%
Yes
39.5%
39.5%
52.6%
No
52.6%

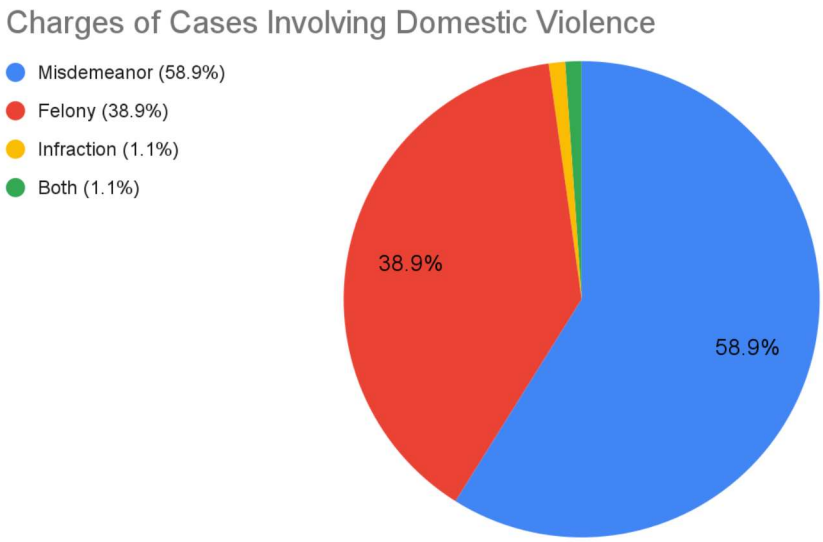

Neglect Cases: Prior Criminal Record/Additional Crimes/Violation of Probation
Yes
24.8%
Nothing Indicated
18.4%
24.8%
18.4%
56.8%
No
56.8%


Violent Cases: Prior Criminal Record/Additional Crimes/Violation of Probation
Juvenile
0.5%
Nothing Indicated
10.2%
10.2%
Yes
41.4%
41.4%
47.8%
No
47.8%

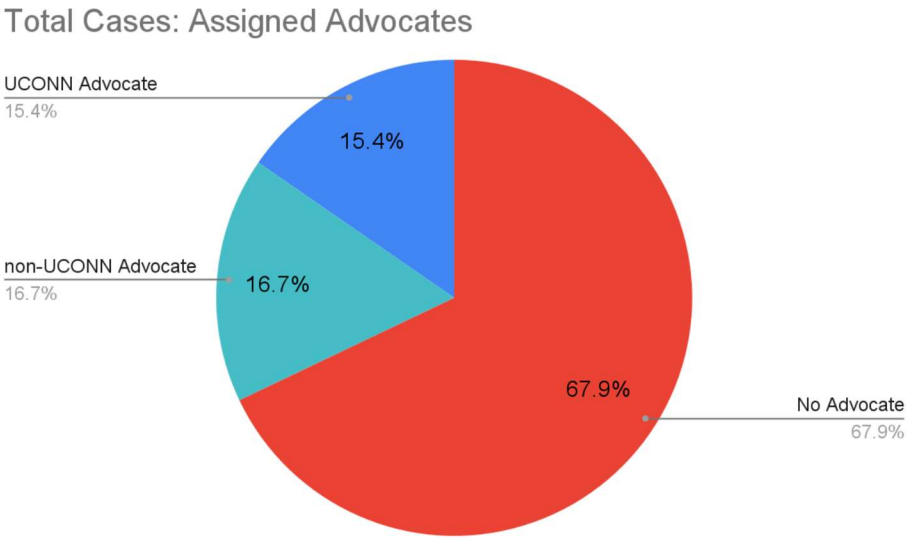
Charts for Link to Interpersonal Violence






Charges of Cases Involving Domestic Violence
Misdemeanor (58.9%)
Felony (38.9%)
Infraction (1.1%)
Both (1.1%)
38.9%
58.9%

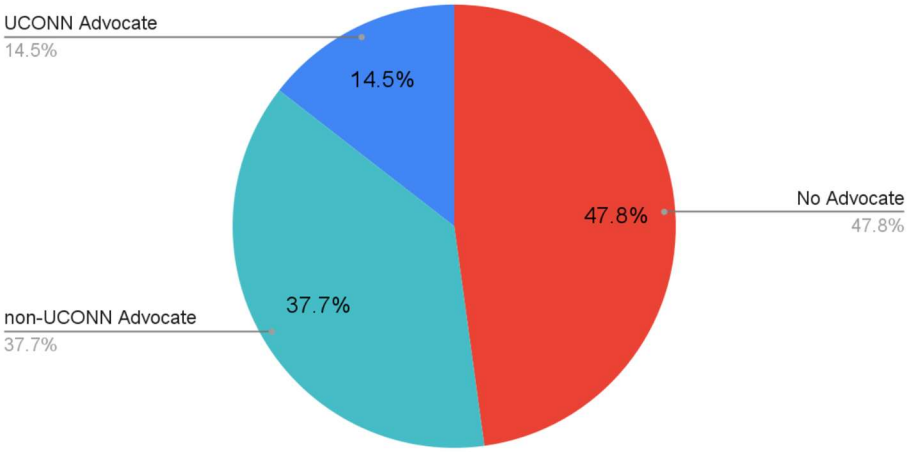
Charts for Attorney Advocate Specific Data Analysis Results[18]



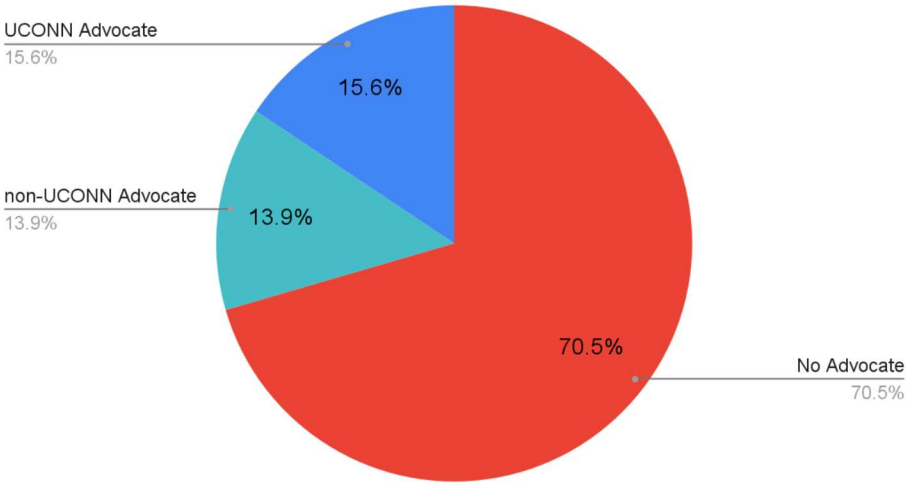
[18] All data analyzed was sourced from records kept, maintained and confirmed by Desmond's Army Animal Law Advocates. That data is derived from court records, documents obtained through Freedom of Information laws and records from open court appearances.

Felony Cases: Assigned Advocates

*4 of these cases also had misdemeanor charges.



Misdemeanor Cases: Assigned Advocates



Part III: The language of Desmond's Law and its translation to the real-world work of appointed attorney advocates

The language of Desmond's Law states, in part, that attorney advocates can provide information and recommendations to the court "in the interest of justice."[19] What does that mean in the real world? The attorney advocate tells the story of what happened. Not only the story of the victim in the snapshot of time that led to the charges in the case. But also, what happened to that victim prior to the abuse and what happened to the victim after the abuse if they survived. The advocate lays out the defendant's pattern of behavior and highlights the human connection. In every animal cruelty case there is a human connection- whether a child was present, domestic violence is noted, elder abuse occurred or it affected the community at large.

To tell that story, the attorney advocate works with any number of stakeholders. It could be the animal control officer who was first on scene, removed the animal and did a report. It could be law enforcement on scene with body cameras, which footage must then be reviewed. Or the veterinarian who saw the animal victim and initiated a course of treatment, took pictures, reviewed X-rays and wrote a report. It may involve speaking with professionals in other jurisdictions regarding cases that are pending or have occurred in the past. It also may require going to other courts and pulling the files, obtaining affidavits from witnesses or visiting the scene of the alleged crime. In criminal cases involving civil forfeiture it necessitates the attorney advocate notifying the criminal court of the outcome in the civil case and vice versa, including any orders issued pertaining to the victim.

When all relevant information is gathered, it is provided to every party involved in the case. When the attorney advocate is in court to tell the story, the documented facts providing back up are in possession of the court and all interested parties. The attorney advocates are there to create a record for that case, for precedent, and for legislation, whether to amend a bill that's currently on the books or for a proposed bill.

The cases detailed below all had individual pro bono attorney advocates assigned to act "in the interest of justice" under Desmond's Law.

[19] Connecticut Gen. Statute section 54-86n.

Desmond's Law Real World Examples[20]

Case 1: State of Connecticut v. Franco Bellini-Zabala[21]

Victim: Axel (Advocate educated the court on the Link, ensured video evidence and post-surgical photos were provided and viewed by all parties)

Axel, a Siberian Husky, was brought into the home, consisting of the defendant, his significant other and two children, when he was eight weeks old.

When Axel was seven months old, a concerned community member contacted animal control. The witness noticed Axel yelping and limping, where one of his legs had been impacted and it had been going on for several weeks. The animal control officer responded to the scene, which happened to be the defendant's place of business. They spoke to the defendant, who told them that Axel had gone into the woods to play two weeks prior and came out limping. The defendant had not taken Axel to the vet for his injury.

Animal control instructed the defendant to take Axel to the vet. Animal control also contacted the animal control officer in the town where the defendant resided. Animal control went to the home to do a welfare check. No one was home but, as they were leaving, a neighbor came out and told animal control they had heard Axel being abused on several occasions and had a video shot several months prior, showing the abuse.

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[20] For all cases discussed the details have come from statements made in open court by interested parties, documents obtained by the public through the Freedom of Information Act, and the notes from assigned attorney advocates.

[21] State of Connecticut v. Franco Bellini-Zabala, Docket N07M-CR22-0349940-S.

The neighbor provided the video a few days later. The video showed Axel sitting outside the home. The defendant walks into the picture, he duct-tapes Axel's snout and drags him into the car. You do not see, but you can clearly hear Axel yelping from being beaten. The defendant then goes into the front of the vehicle while Axel is still in the back and pulls away.

At about the same time, animal control received a call from an emergency animal clinic about a dog. The vet called because the dog had been dropped off by the owner and the story told did not match the injuries presented and the results of x-rays taken. That dog was Axel.

The x-rays showed that Axel had eight different fractures which were weeks to months old. The defendant was charged with misdemeanor animal cruelty.

The defendant tried to argue that Axel was a new member of the household, and those injuries were from whoever owned him prior. But the animal control officer had done research and was able to locate vet records showing that the defendant and his significant other had taken Axel to the vet when he was about eight weeks old; demonstrating the defendant was the owner of Axel since he was a puppy. The facts showed that, from the time he was about eight weeks until shortly before seven months old, Axel was abused over a period, because the injuries were at various stages of healing. That was the pattern of behavior in the case.

The attorney advocate worked with the foster family, animal control and the vet for several months. The goal was to save one of Axel's legs that had been severely damaged from the repeated abuse. Amputation was a last resort. However, several months in, the vet did make the recommendation to amputate.

The included picture is of Axel the day that his foster family went to pick him up after his leg was amputated. The advocate ensured the picture was taken and provided it to the court as well as the video of the abuse. The court had not viewed the video until the advocate stressed its importance.

The importance of the picture and video cannot be understated. It is one thing for the attorney advocate to tell the story to the court with words. But pictures and video show what the victims go through and what the consequences are to them, based upon the defendant's actions.

Axel was adopted by his foster family and is doing fine as a tripod. The defendant in this case received accelerated rehabilitation, a diversionary program, which permits the defendant's record to be erased upon completion. The attorney advocate was able to successfully request restitution, and the defendant agreed not to have animals.

Interpersonal Connection: There were two children in the home[22] who witnessed this pattern of abuse. A child's exposure to the treatment of animals — positive or negative — informs how they treat humans and animals in childhood into adulthood. They can become desensitized to cruelty if that is what they witness in their environment.[23]

[22] This case was cross reported under Connecticut Public Act 14-70.
[23] https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/the-link-between-animal-cruelty-and-human-violence

***Case 2: State of Connecticut v. Jack Yammine*[24]**

Victim: Buddy (Attorney advocate educated the court on the Link, argued successfully for a ban on animals to be included in order of protection for 25 years-precedent established

The picture on the left is Buddy the day after he was seized by animal control. He looks sad and his face is drawn. The picture on the right is Buddy several months after that first picture was taken, when he was in a foster home.

Buddy's story is a familiar one involving an abuser who exhibited power and control through abusing the family pet. Buddy's owner became agitated when his wife did not answer her phone at work. He put a shocker collar on Buddy and continuously shocked him, causing injury to Buddy and leaving a bloody scene throughout several rooms in the home. When his wife came home, she heard the tail-end of this abuse. When the defendant left the spouse called law enforcement to report the abuse. Law enforcement responded with animal control and body cameras were used at the scene.

The body cam footage showed what looked like a murder scene. Every time Buddy was shocked, he would bite his tongue, and there were bloody paw prints throughout all the rooms he was in when he was being abused. Buddy suffered puncture wounds to his neck and tongue.

[24] State of Connecticut v. Yammine Jack Antoine U04W-CR22-0502529-S.

Notably, despite what he had gone through, when animal control approached him on the scene that night, he was very friendly, and they removed him from the scene without incident.

The judge requested to hear from the defendant's spouse. The attorney advocate contacted the victim through her divorce attorney. This was a delicate situation, but the attorney advocate conveyed that if she could make a statement, it would be helpful. The victim was willing to tell her story.

The statement made by the victim in open court, detailing what she went through, what Buddy went through and the abuse by the defendant toward another dog visibly moved everyone in the courtroom.

An excerpt from the transcript that day is included below:

"I think the image of Buddy, our dog, standing there all covered with blood, is embroidered in my brain. His white fur was completely red. A terrifying image. It took me two hours to clean that garage from blood, and it still has a weird smell that reminds me that it could have been me. I will never forget the smell of rotten blood."[25]

The victim also noted that the defendant had told her, "I wish I could put this shocker collar on you."[26] The victim further told the court that the couple's child was present during previous abuse of Buddy and another dog owned by the family.[27]

The attorney advocate knew from the file that there had been another dog in the home and that the victim was able to get that dog to safety and away from the defendant. That dog had been abused in the same manner as Buddy. The defendant's pattern of behavior was consistent from victim to victim.

The attorney advocate was able to speak with a former neighbor to corroborate the victim's statement of abuse toward both the first dog and Buddy. The advocate worked with the witness to have her affidavit submitted to the court detailing the abuse she heard regarding both dogs.

In Connecticut, a lifetime ban on ownership of animals is unfortunately not permitted under the law. Given the facts in this case the advocate knew the defendant could not be permitted to have animals for a significant period and advocated based upon the facts of the case. The order of protection issued in the case included a provision that the defendant was not to threaten, injure or harass animals owned by either victim. In addition, the advocate successfully had a provision

[25] Transcript of hearing held on October 3, 2023 in *State of Connecticut v. Jack Antoine Yammine*, U04W-CR22-0502529-S (Superior Court G.A. #4 Waterbury CT).
[26] Transcript from hearing held on October 3, 2023 in *State of Connecticut v. Jack Antoine Yammine*, U04W-CR22-0502529-S (Superior Court G.A. #4 Waterbury CT).
[27] Transcript of hearing held on October 3, 2023 in *State of Connecticut v. Jack Antoine Yammine*, U04W-CR22-0502529-S (Superior Court G.A. #4 Waterbury CT).

added that for 25 years he cannot own animals at all. This was the first result of its kind for an animal cruelty case in Connecticut.

Buddy was adopted by his foster family, travels quite often, and is living a great life.

Interpersonal connection #1: The defendant's child was in the home when the abuse took place.[28]

Interpersonal connection #2: The defendant's spouse was a victim, evident from the statement she made in court.

Case 3: State of Connecticut v. Philip Lin[29]

Victims: Blue and Bobo (Attorney advocate contacted another jurisdiction for information on crimes against the elderly and a minor and provided information to the court; educated the court on the Link; successfully argued against Accelerated Rehabilitation and Supervised Diversionary Program)

This case concluded in December of 2024 after nearly three years from when the first victim was killed. Philip Lin had victims in multiple states-human and animal.

[28] This case was cross reported under Connecticut Public Act 14-70.

[29] State of Connecticut v. Phillip J. Lin Case No.: N07M-CR22-0351270-S.

This case started when a social worker visited Lin's home in March of 2022. His mother told the social worker that Lin had killed a dog by punching him in the face and leaving him to drown in a bathtub. The social worker reported that to local law enforcement. About two months later, another social worker went to the house and Lin's mother told her that he killed another dog by snapping his neck. Lin was charged with two felony animal cruelty counts after admitting to law enforcement he killed both dogs.

Lin violated his conditions of release almost immediately after being instructed not to be around dogs unsupervised. He was charged with another felony. Approximately nine months later, Lin took off his ankle monitor and fled. He was found hiding in a closet in his mother's home about six months later, charged with another felony, denied bail and remained incarcerated.

About a year into the case, the attorney advocate contacted authorities in Vermont regarding pending charges noted in the file. The Vermont prosecutor was not aware that Lin had pending felony animal cruelty charges in Connecticut. The attorney advocate was provided with the file from Vermont and provided it to the court, prosecutor and defense attorney in Connecticut.

The attorney advocate noted on the record that Lin targeted the most vulnerable of society: an elderly woman, a minor and animals. The judge noted on the record that he was very concerned about Lin's tendency to harm people and animals, as reported by a counselor who examined Lin while he was incarcerated.[30]

Lin pled guilty to both felony animal cruelty charges and was sentenced on each as follows: 5 years suspended after 18 months to serve with 3 years conditional probation.[31] A jail sentence for animal cruelty convictions is not often seen in the state of Connecticut. Based upon his conduct in the Connecticut case, and the charges for felony animal cruelty after the Vermont charges, the judge in the Vermont case ordered Lin back to Vermont to face all charges. Upon release from prison in Connecticut Lin is expected to be extradited to Vermont.

Interpersonal connection #1 & #2: Of the 21 charges in Vermont, one was for assaulting an elderly woman, and one was for luring a 13-year-old on Snapchat. The attorney advocate noted that the report on the charges involving the 13-year-old were some of the most disturbing they had read.

[30] Transcript of hearing held on December 9, 2024 in *State of Connecticut v. Philip Lin* N07M-CR23-0352313-S N07M-MV22-0570669-S, N07M-CR22-0351270-S, N07M-CR22-0351503-S, N07M-CR22-0350255-S (Superior Court G.A. #7 Meriden CT).

[31] Transcript of hearing held on December 9, 2024 in *State of Connecticut v. Philip Lin* N07M-CR23-0352313-S N07M-MV22-0570669-S, N07M-CR22-0351270-S, N07M-CR22-0351503-S, N07M-CR22-0350255-S (Superior Court G.A. #7 Meriden CT).

Case 4: State of Connecticut v. Ray Neuberger[32]

Victims: Gem and Pearl (Attorney advocate educated the court on the failure of Accelerated Rehabilitation, ensured felony charge for abuse resulting in death of a victim and subsequent crime charged as a felony per Connecticut law)

Neuberger was first charged with animal cruelty in 2018 and was permitted to enter a diversionary program called Accelerated Rehabilitation whereby the record is wiped clean after a certain period. In the 2018 case he severely abused two dogs belonging to his girlfriend.

Neuberger's pattern of behavior continued when he was arrested in 2022 and originally charged with a misdemeanor for killing a cat belonging to his new girlfriend. The cat, Gem, was brought to an emergency vet by the girlfriend after she returned home finding Gem semi-conscious while Neuberger was alone with her. The veterinarian reported the abuse and noted as follows: Gem was covered in bleach, had two broken teeth, a bloody mouth, abrasions to the forehead and ear, collapsed lungs, was hypodermic and had trauma to her head and chest. Gem did not survive the abuse. The necropsy report states that Gem died from bleeding into the abdomen from a ruptured liver, and indications of multiple blunt force trauma impacts. Based upon statements made to law enforcement, as contained in the warrant, a determination was made that Gem sustained the injuries from Neuberger.

[32] State of Connecticut v. Raymond James Neuberger F02B-CR22-0348646-S and State of Connecticut v. Raymond James Neuberger F02B-CR23-0350416-S.

During the investigation another victim of Neuberger's was identified. Pearl, also a cat, was severely burned with chemicals causing extensive injuries and trauma. Pearl's tail was amputated a result of the abuse. Neuberger was charged with another felony for Pearl's injuries. Due to the medical costs for Pearl's care, Neuberger's girlfriend was forced to surrender her.

Neuberger's charges also included threatening and harassing law enforcement, and, at one point, his bond was increased to $1 million due to his behavior.

The attorney advocate on this case successfully advocated for Gem's abuse to be raised to a felony. Under Connecticut law, a second offence for animal cruelty is a felony. However, subsequent charges are often mischarged as misdemeanors. The advocate ensured that Pearl's abuse was properly charged.[33] The advocate also ensured that a record was created detailing the failure of Accelerated Rehabilitation as a deterrent for animal cruelty and the escalation with the latest two victims. The advocate ensured that the graphic evidence of the sustained abuse of the two victims was before the court each time the case was scheduled.

In December 2023 Neuberger pled guilty and was sentenced to six years suspended after 17 months, followed by four years of probation. His probation included conditions of no pets, no unsupervised contact with animals, no weapons, and no contact with his former girlfriend or the officer.

Neuberger violated his probation in 2025 and was rearrested. His case for the violation is pending.

Interpersonal connection: Based upon texts messages and statements from Neuberger's girlfriend there were domestic disputes and an arrest warrant was issued for Neuberger based upon domestic incidences.

[33] Conn. Gen. Stat. § 53-247.

Case 5: State of Connecticut v. Michael Konschak[34]

Victims: Cimo & Leiben (Attorney advocate successfully argued for appointment under Desmond's Law, succeeded in having animal cruelty charges added where none were charged initially-precedent established), and educated the court on the serious implications of a crime of this nature.

This case was particularly gruesome and tragic. Cimo and Leiben were beloved family members. One day they escaped their yard after a bear knocked down a portion of the fence, unbeknownst to the family. Their family engaged in a search for weeks, using any means to bring their dogs home, including volunteers, a professional tracker, reward offerings, and a psychic.

Unfortunately, on the day they escaped, the defendant, a New York resident, crossed into Connecticut and was illegally hunting on a neighboring property. It is believed he shot both dogs with a crossbow. It is also believed they did not succumb to their injuries immediately. Both dogs had been spayed/neutered and had the typical markings to identify the procedures. When the defendant was turned away by a taxidermist who noted that these were pets, he skinned and beheaded both Cimo and Leiben. It was later discovered that he discarded portions of their bodies in various locations.

[34] State of Connecticut v. Michael Reinhold Konschak D03D-CR23-0194862-S.

An investigation began on a tip after the defendant sent pictures of the bodies of Cimo and Leiben to another individual. The defendant attempted to cover up his crime by forging documents giving him permission to hunt and lying to the state agency overseeing hunting licenses. The defendant was not initially charged with animal cruelty. He was only charged with crimes addressing the forgery of documents for hunting, interfering with officers and a violation of hunting regulations by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

After a series of hearings and meetings, the attorney advocate successfully argued to be appointed in this case, even though animal cruelty charges had not been filed. The attorney was able to educate the court on the need for an advocate in this case and the implications of the crimes committed. Then the attorney was able to work with all parties to have the animal cruelty charges added. Due to the gravity of the crime, the defendant was denied Accelerated Rehabilitation. At all times, the attorney advocate communicated with the family of the victims and visited the crime scene.

The defendant pled guilty to misdemeanor animal cruelty, receiving a suspended sentence and 3 years' probation, with a host of conditions drafted by the attorney advocate. The conditions included no hunting, no possession of firearms or other weapons, no unsupervised contact with animals except his own pet and nearly $10,000 in restitution.

Interpersonal connection #1: The family of the victims were utterly devastated by the loss of their dogs and the gruesome way they were killed and discarded. The family relived the loss during the pendency of the case.

Interpersonal connection #2: The defendant worked as respiratory therapist in a hospital, caring for vulnerable patients. As a result of his actions, the defendant was terminated from his employment.[35]

[35] https://www.timesunion.com/hudsonvalley/news/article/ridgefield-cimo-leiben-killed-hunting-konschak-18389432.php.

Case 6: State of Connecticut v. Nyisha Squeglia[36]

Victim: Unnamed female (Attorney advocate ensured that when the felony charge was entered into the court system as a misdemeanor it was corrected, made a clear record of the prolonged torture inflicted on the victim resulting in slow, painful death and argued for jail time successfully)

Even to the most seasoned advocates in Connecticut this case was the worst many had seen in over 25 years. The horrifying videos of the abuse suffered by the victim in this case are indescribable and defy any sense of comprehension.

The defendant had a criminal history and was on probation when she killed her dog. The torture was captured over 15 minutes of video on a neighbor's security system. When police responded to the complaint the defendant initially lied about having a dog as she attempted to conceal the body on her property.

The report detailed what is seen on the videos and included beating, kicking, whipping, slamming, dragging, and swinging of the dog by the neck and her hind leg -all acts of prolonged torture and violence that culminated in the death of the dog. The report further details Squeglia using different objects/approaches to injure the animal "to cause a maximum amount of harm" including hot water and a pipe. The torture continued even when the dog "appeared limp and lifeless." Prior to the victim losing consciousness the videos do not show the dog trying to attack, bite or lunge at the abuser. Rather she cowered and attempted to get away from the beatings inflicted by the defendant.

The defendant initially tried to defend her actions by stating that the dog attacked her child. However, when police investigated on the day of the dog's death the child had a one-centimeter

[36] State of Connecticut v. Nyisha Squeglia F02B-CR23-0353751-S.

scab on their body. Additionally, videos from the day prior to the abuse showed the dog, the defendant and the child sitting on the porch together.

The defendant pled guilty to felony animal cruelty and was given a sentence of 5 years suspended after 14 months and 3 years conditional probation. Jail time is not often given in animal cruelty cases in Connecticut, but the judge noted the disturbing nature of the abuse, suffering of the victim and thanked the advocate for "speaking for the voiceless." In this case, an unnamed dog whose life was ended in an unspeakable way.

Interpersonal connection: The defendant's one year old child was present when the abuse occurred. The child was removed and placed in the father's custody.[37]

As the cases above demonstrate, animal cruelty does not occur in a vacuum. There is always a human connection that must be considered and should be addressed when consequences are imposed for abusers.

When animal crimes are prosecuted, our communities are safer. This means when animal crimes are taken seriously, when the court is provided with the full story, when these cases are properly prosecuted, we get the best resolution and there are consequences that act as a deterrent. That is how we stop a cycle, halt escalation, and disallow animal cruelty from becoming a gateway crime to human violence.

Part IV: Desmond's Law 2025: Where Do We Go from Here

As with any legislation, once in effect, the strengths and weaknesses become apparent and must be addressed. Failure to do so weakens the goal and intent of the legislation. Desmond's Law is groundbreaking, the first law in the country to give animal victims a true voice in the courtroom through attorneys. However, the language limiting appointment to cases involving dogs and cats fails to capture nearly 40% of victims in the state of Connecticut.[38] The data analysis shows that cruelty case victims include horses, goats, pigs, birds, rabbits, guinea pigs, chickens, sheep and other animals. Currently, attorneys can only be appointed for animals other than dogs and cats at the discretion of a judge. It has rarely happened in Connecticut since 2016.

Animals abusers do not limit their victims to dogs and cats, and the law should not limit those victims who are appointed advocates. The "interest of justice" should include any animal victim. Animal abusers who victimize horses, goats, sheep, rabbits, chickens etc. are just as likely to escalate in violence and expand to humans as those who abuse dogs and cats. The opportunity should exist for attorney advocates to be appointed in any animal cruelty case in Connecticut.

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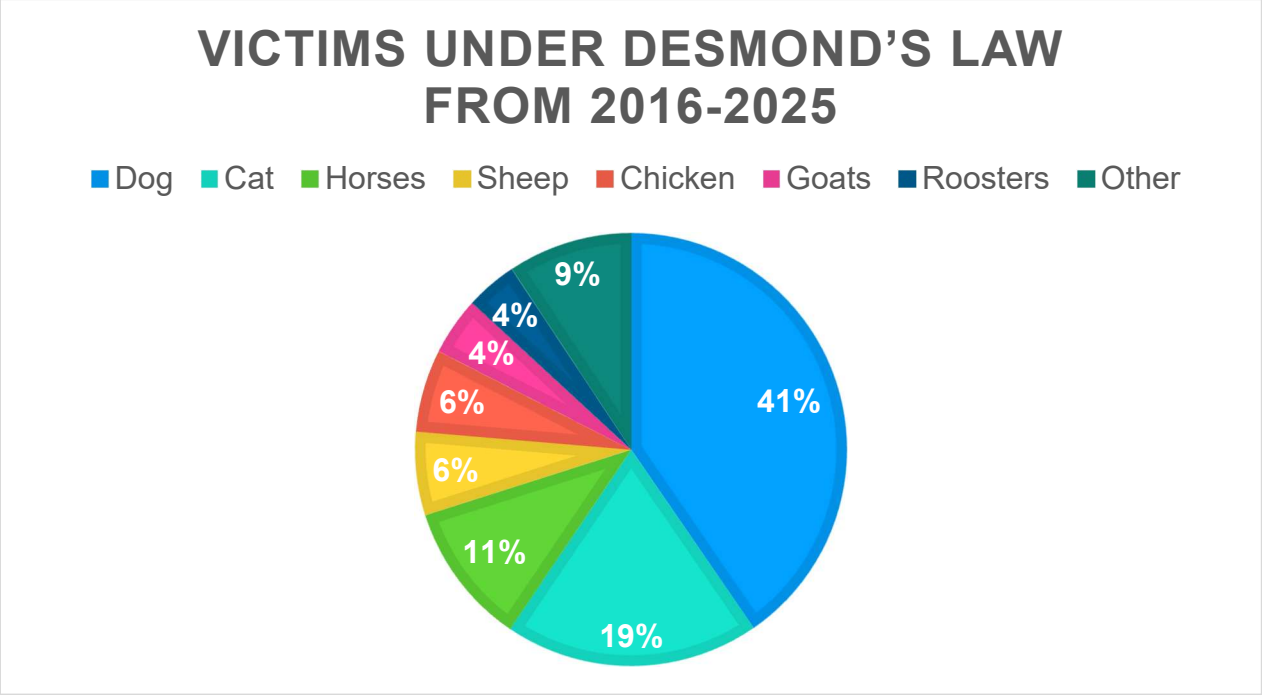
[37] This case was cross reported under Connecticut Public Act 14-70.

[38] All data analyzed was sourced from records kept, maintained and confirmed by Desmond's Army Animal Law Advocates. That data is derived from court records, documents obtained through Freedom of Information laws and records from open court appearances.

Expansion of Desmond's Law would also be instructive for other jurisdictions proposing similar bills for attorney advocates.



Conclusion

Animal cruelty crimes warrant attention and priority. Consequences must be imposed for crimes committed against animal victims in their own right, but also for the interpersonal connections in cases. Often grassroots advocates are the changemakers and "voices" for the victims of these crimes. Desmond's Army Animal Law Advocates is one of those organizations. What began as a grassroots response to a single unspeakable injustice grew into a full-fledged movement for legal reform and public education. That expanded into a groundbreaking piece of legislation that brings this issue to the forefront of discussions, presentations and legislation.

After Desmond's Law was passed, Desmond's Army's work continued and expanded to ensure the law was being enforced and remains a focus. Funding necropsies, monitoring court proceedings, or sheltering a victim's pet, the organization stands unwavering in its mission: to be a voice for the voiceless. Their work endures as research continues to show that those who abuse animals are likely to harm people as well. Desmond's death was not in vain. His story lives on through every animal cruelty hearing presence, continued advocacy for expansion of this law and passage in other municipalities, and the lives protected by the ongoing efforts of Desmond's Army.

Desmond's Army believes that the measure of a just society lies in how it treats its most vulnerable. Through persistence, education, and unity, the organization continues to prove that voices joined in purpose can change the system and the world.

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[40] Joyce Glass is a practicing pro bono attorney focusing on companion animal cruelty and the Link to interpersonal violence and presents frequently to stakeholders on this topic; she is an attorney advocate under Desmond's Law and drafts legislation related to companion animal cruelty in New York and North Carolina. Joyce holds a JD from Hofstra Law, MBA from the Zarb School of Business, and an LLM in Animal Law from Lewis and Clark Law School.

[41] Olivia Dorian is a recent graduate of Colgate University where she majored in Political Science and Studio Art with plans to attend law school in the future.