

The Governor's Commission on the Humane Treatment of Animals

Meeting Minutes – November 16, 2020

Call to Order: Roll Call

- Regular meeting of the Governor's Commission on the Humane Treatment of Animals was called to order at 1:00 pm via Zoom by Acting Co-Chairs, Jeri Zezula and Jennifer Eber.
- Members asked to put their affiliation in their Zoom registration or to rename within Zoom.
- We welcomed our newest member, Jozi Best, representing the NH Farm Bureau!

Members Present

- Jozi Best – NH Farm Bureau
- Senator Regina Birdsell (R-Hampstead) – NH Senator
- George Cook – Dog Owners of the Granite State/NH Musers
- Dr. Stephen Crawford – State Veterinarian
- Tom DeRosa – General Public
- Jennifer Eber – General Public
- Heather Faria – NH Federation of Humane Organizations
- Sheila Johannsen – Animal Control Officers Association of NH
- Patricia Morris – Equine Associations
- Sheriff Mike Moyer – NH Sheriff's Association
- Wendy Munroe – NH Veterinary Technician Association
- Representative John O'Connor (R-Derry) – NH Representative
- Julia Seeley – Secretary, National Humane Organization
- Tom Seymour – General Public
- Dr. Jeri Zezula – General Public

Members Absent

- Jane Barlow Roy – NH Veterinary Medical Association
- Cynthia Collins – General Public
- Marga Coulp – General Public
- Gary Lambert – NH Sportsmen
- Chief Dean Rondeau – NH Police Chief's Association
- Steven Sprowl – Humane Cruelty Investigator

Public Present

- None

Review and Approval of October Minutes

- Rep O'Connor moved to approve the minutes from the October 19 meeting. Tom seconded. All approved except Jozi, Dr. Crawford, Sheriff Moyer, Senator Birdsell, and Trish, who abstained.
- **Next Steps:** Jeri to upload minutes to the Commission website.

Zoom Meeting with Governor's Office Liaisons, Jennifer Eber/Jeri Zezula/Patricia Morris

- Jonathan Melanson joined the Commission meeting to discuss recent communications with the Governor's Office with Jennifer, Jeri, and Trish.
 - They discussed appointing a new chair and are waiting for an answer.
 - Regarding the empty UNH Co-Op seat, the Governor's Office has reached out to them and will try to get it filled before the December meeting.

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- When discussing a response to the 2016-2017 Cruelty Report, Jon received feedback that the Governor's Office will be following up with the Dept of Justice to determine which records can be collected moving forward for this document. He also received confirmation that the two main recommendations from the report will be put in progress:
 - Need to understand why charges are so low compared to cases
 - Need to understand why charges are dropped or reduced
- Jon noted that the difference between cases and charges is noteworthy and we need to determine what can be done to bridge that gap.
- **Next Steps:** Jeri, Jennifer, and Trish to provide an update during the December meeting.

Commission Manual Update

- Jeri received additional feedback since the last meeting from members and has incorporated it into the manual. She sent the manual to the AG's Office with a list of questions and got an immediate response. The AG's Office will assign the Commission a liaison to review the manual.
- We are waiting for confirmation on the following requests:
 - Manual to be posted on the AG's website with the law enforcement manual.
 - The 2020 LE manual has been posted and includes no mention of animal cruelty
 - AG's Office to write a forward for the manual.
- A big thank you to Jeri for her hard work and dedication to update this manual!
- **Next Steps:** Jeri to provide an update during the December meeting.

New Cruelty Cases/14-Day Status Hearing

- Jennifer said Judge King issued an advisory opinion to the court regarding the 14-day status hearing. She asked the Commission if the status hearing is happening and whether it needs to be a court rule.
 - Dr. Crawford explained that his office is not responsible for animal cruelty and that it's a law enforcement issue.
 - Heather said she has not had the opportunity to have a status hearing and that it's a source of concern. Some organizations are holding animals and these hearings have not happened.
- Jennifer asked the Commission to send her examples of cases in which the status hearing is not taking place so she can send them to the Judicial Rules Committee.
- Sheriff Moyer noted that the pandemic threw all the normal judiciary processes out the window. The Courts have been shut down for awhile and they are only taking emergency cases. The coronavirus impacted all sorts of cases (for example, there have been no jury trials in Belknap since March) so these status hearings are likely not high on their agenda.
- **Next Steps:** Commission members to notify Jennifer if they experience a lack of a status hearing.

New Business

New Animal Cruelty LSRs

- Julia and Rep O'Connor explained that the LSR filing period was still underway so not all bills have been filed for 2021. Julia will provide a chart of applicable LSRs for the December meeting.
 - Rep O'Connor said that he will follow up with Rep Pearl on upcoming bills.
 - Senator Birdsell said that she will follow up with Senator Bradley on upcoming bills.
- **Next Steps:** Julia to create a chart of LSRs to date (same format as last year) for the December meeting.

NH Crime Statistics from Website

- Jeri led a discussion about the NH animal cruelty case data she obtained from NIBRS.

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- Most towns are reporting to NIBRS. Some towns and sheriff departments are not connected, even though NH is considered a NIBRS state. Sheriff Moyer noted that many small towns are covered by State Police.
- According to the website, most cases were neglect, there were abuse and torture cases, and there were cases of organized abuse (animal fighting) and bestiality.
- Jeri gave examples of stat totals per year, including:
 - 2017 = 76 incidents, 5 arrests
 - 2018 = 124 incidents, 16 summoned, 21 in custody, 4 arrests
 - Not sure when 2019 will be available.
 - Sheriff Moyer said we can get totals from the state at the end of the year.
- George asked if we are missing information from ACOs, and Sheila said she believes that is the case.
 - Sheila said she has five cases that haven't been reported to police. She has found that progress on cases often stops when they reach the police department. She also said many ACOs keep their own case records and do not report information to a centralized system like NIBRS.
 - Julia noted it is critical that the Commission is explicit about the shortcomings in their cruelty reporting documents since there are organizations using our report to justify why new animal cruelty laws are not needed in New Hampshire.
 - Sheriff Moyer said he doesn't think the lack of data is a technology issue – Belknap County has been using NIBRS for decades.
 - Heather recommended that this topic be added to the list of discussion items for the AG's Office as part of our overall need to understand how to address cruelty reporting moving forward.
- **Next Steps:** Jeri to discuss reporting requirements for police and ACOs with AG's Office.

Weekly Zoom Meetings During Legislative Session & Commission Opinion Reports to Legislature

- Jennifer asked the Commission about scheduling weekly Zoom meetings during the legislative session to effectively respond to all applicable bills (i.e., issuing positions, submitting testimony, etc.)
- Julia explained that many advocacy organizations send email communications to all legislators summarizing their positions on individual bills. Doing so ensures that all members are aware of their position, not just those in certain committees, and that their positions are not misrepresented during hearings.
 - Rep O'Connor agreed with this approach since it is not yet clear how the session will operate next year (remote vs. in-person) and it promotes transparency. Senator Birdsell agreed that emails provide a good track record, though personal contact/calls are very helpful.
- Julia recommended that the Commission send an email with its positions on priority bills to all legislators the first week of session (the week of January 11) and after crossover (end of March).
 - The first day of session is on Wednesday, January 6 (December 2 is technically the first day, but it's for administrative purposes, not legislation).
 - The January Commission meeting will be held on Monday, January 11. At that meeting, the Commission will finalize its list of priority bills and members will vote.
 - Julia noted that Trish has done an excellent job testifying on behalf of the Commission and promoting the Commission's expertise on a variety of issues. But doing so took up a lot of her time and energy, and with so many bills being introduced that is a lot to ask of anyone. By sending a legislature-wide email, the Commission can be highly selective with additional actions.
- **Next Steps:** Julia to prepare voting spreadsheet (same format as last year) for January meeting.

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Attendance/Participation Requirements

- Trish expressed concern that not all Commission members are fulfilling their role and adequately participating in meetings. She suggested we develop an internal protocol regarding attendance. If a member cannot attend a meeting, we need a process for sending in delegates from their office/organization/department, etc. to ensure all voices are heard.
 - Jeri said we could poll people to see if they still want to be on the Commission. There is currently no way to change the Executive Order.
 - Jonathan said that nearly all appointments are on a volunteer basis, and if someone is only able to donate their time for a certain period, they don't take it personally. He is not a fan of creating a policy that requires people to attend.
- Senator Birdsell noted that legislators may have a tougher time attending meetings next year since the session may run Monday-Thursday instead of Tuesday-Thursday.
- Jennifer concluded that the Commission will not proceed with creating an attendance policy and asks that everyone try to make these meetings a priority.

Suggested Law Changes from the Commission

- Jennifer said that the Executive Order allows for the Commission to react to proposed legislation and to pursue the introduction of new legislation. She asked the Commission how we could get that going.
- Trish noted that the Commission used to not be able to get involved in legislation and three years ago everything changed. They had talked about the Commission being a sounding board for the public and legislators who are interested in introducing a bill.
 - Sheila said she wants a bill that recognizes ACOs and requires training. Jozi said the NH Farm Bureau has also talked about the need for more training. Jennifer noted this is more about legislation vs. training opportunities.
- Rep O'Connor said there are national organizations legislators can tap into for direction on legislation.
- Jennifer suggested we invite legislators to Commission meetings to discuss legislative opportunities.
- **Next Steps:** Commission to create a committee to explore new legislation.

Committees

- Jeri led a discussion about committees – we've had three in the past:
 - Animal cruelty (which involves development of the required biannual report for the Governor)
 - Funding (which has been essentially resolved thanks to Rep O'Connor's cost of care bill)
 - Legislation (Julia handled in 2019-2020 with ongoing tracking done by Trish's student)
- Heather suggested a committee be created for training.
- Jennifer suggested a committee for the development of new legislation.
- **Next Steps:** Commission members to send committee suggestions to Jeri and Jennifer. They will follow up with a list of committee options. All members will respond with their first and second choice. All members will be assigned a committee.

Sheila moved to adjourn the meeting. Senator Birdsell seconded. All approved. Meeting adjourned at 2:42 pm.

The next meeting is on Monday, December 14 at 1:00 pm via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted by Julia Seeley, Secretary