

Woman to start paying nearly \$2M in Great Danes neglect case

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Associated Press

Published: 3/4/2021 5:05:45 PM

A woman who was convicted in 2018 of housing dozens of filthy and sick Great Danes in her New Hampshire mansion must now start paying back nearly \$2 million for their care, a judge ruled Thursday.

Christina Fay was found guilty of 17 counts of animal cruelty. She had been sentenced to pay the bulk of the money to the Humane Society of the United States, which took in, cared for and found homes for most of the 84 dogs seized from her 13,000-square-foot Wolfeboro residence in 2017. She also had to pay money to the town itself.

Her case was put on hold as she appealed to the New Hampshire Supreme Court, saying her privacy was violated when authorities allowed the Humane Society to take photos and video as it helped gather the dogs from the house. Her lawyer also unsuccessfully argued that Wolfeboro police had failed to disclose that an animal welfare group would be participating when they requested a search warrant from a judge. The court rejected Fay's appeal in December.

Fay, 62, who joined the video hearing by phone and did not speak, has five years to pay back the money, in monthly installments. She had pleaded not guilty and maintained that she loved the dogs.

"I lost everything I love," she said in 2018.

Court records and testimony showed that Fay said she wanted to be the primary U.S. collector of European Great Danes and had been acquiring and breeding them since 2014.

Authorities who seized the dogs from Fay's mansion back in June 2017 said the animals were living in urine and feces and suffering from health problems. Prosecutors accused her of neglect, withholding water and allowing the dogs' medical conditions to fester. Some of the dogs later died.

Her attorney, James Cowles, said Thursday he had \$142,000 in escrow for the first payments, and suggested that the arrangement would have to be revisited at some point.

"We're looking at a staggering amount of restitution," he said, adding, "Unless Ms. Fay's circumstances drastically change, I don't know how she's going to be able to satisfy the entire amount in full in five years, given how large it is."

Separately, Fay filed a personal injury lawsuit in Washington, D.C., against the town and the Humane Society last year, asking for \$35 million. A message seeking comment was sent to her lawyer in that case.

In 2018, a judge had suspended a 12-month jail sentence in favor of Fay's willingness to meet with a counselor. Fay was told she could keep only two dogs, but one has since died. Cowles asked if Fay could get another dog, but Judge Amy Ignatius didn't agree to that Thursday.

In 2019, Gov. Chris Sununu signed into law a bill allowing courts to hold a hearing no later than two weeks after animals are seized so the animals don't have to wait months for new homes. It also sets deadlines for payment of post-conviction bonds to reduce the financial burden on taxpayers and nonprofit animal rescue organizations.