



Mark Speakman
Attorney General
Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence

MEDIA RELEASE

Sunday, 18 October 2020

NEW LAWS TO HELP PROTECT PETS FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PERPETRATORS

Domestic violence victim-survivors and their companion animals will have greater protections under proposed Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) reforms.

Attorney General and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence Mark Speakman said animals are often used as an instrument of coercive control designed to torment victims.

“Perpetrators use animals to intimidate, retaliate against, and manipulate victims during the relationship and after separation, as punishment for leaving,” Mr Speakman said.

“Animal abuse in domestic violence settings can also delay victims leaving violent situations for fear of having their companion animals left unprotected with perpetrators.”

The Government’s Bill, to be introduced in NSW Parliament this week, will amend the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007* and expand the conditions of ADVOs.

Currently, ADVOs have conditions that prohibit the defendant from harassing, stalking or intimidating the protected person, or from destroying or damaging their property or the property of anyone with whom they are in a domestic relationship.

The reforms will change the definition of ‘intimidation’ to indicate explicitly that harm to, or harm threatened to, animals is a form of intimidation. The Bill will also ensure that the protection of animals will be a standard condition in all ADVOs.

“This is an important step that will make it easier to respond to this vile form of abuse that seeks to terrorise victims and their much-loved animals,” Mr Speakman said.

While there are existing animal cruelty laws, this reform means if offences are committed in the context of a domestic relationship, with intent to coerce or control the victim, or cause intimidation or fear, they may be also charged as domestic violence offences.

Domestic Violence NSW Interim CEO Delia Donovan said the crucial changes announced today were welcomed by the organisation – NSW’s peak body for specialist domestic violence services.

“Feedback from frontline workers indicates that domestic violence victim-survivors often disclose that perpetrators have threatened to harm or kill animals,” Ms Donovan said.

“Protecting animals from perpetrators will therefore continue to improve the safety of people experiencing domestic and family violence across NSW.”

Further details of the Bill will be available on the [NSW Parliament website](#), when it is introduced this week.

In addition, the NSW Government has invested \$500,000 in a one-off grants program for refuges and animal shelters to support companion animals when victims flee violent homes.

Mr Speakman said refuges and animal shelters could begin applying to the Pets and Animal Welfare Support (PAWS) Grants Program this week.

“These funds will enable refuges to become pet-friendly and to enhance the capacity of animal welfare services to provide temporary foster care for animals so women can leave violent homes without worrying their pet will be harmed,” Mr Speakman said.

RSPCA NSW CEO Steve Coleman welcomed the PAWS Program and said their shelters stood ready to support vulnerable members of the community.

“The RSPCA is really pleased to play our part in ensuring victims of domestic violence can escape an abusive home and know that their companion animal will be very well cared for by our dedicated staff,” Mr Coleman said.

The grant program funds formed part of the NSW and Commonwealth Government’s [\\$21 million boost to frontline domestic violence services](#) and other supports, during COVID-19.

To apply to the PAWS Program, visit <https://www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/dfv-paws>.