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September 13, 2007

Judy Newcomb
Baldwin County District Attorney
1 Courthouse Sq
Bay Minette, AL 36507

VIA FACSIMILE: 251-937-0380

Dear Ms. Newcomb:

On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States (The HSUS) and our more than 100,000 members and supporters in Alabama, I am writing to you regarding a horrific case of animal cruelty involving a 17-year-old boy who reportedly set on fire a neighbor's puppy. Considering the extremely violent nature of the crime and the youth of the offender, I urge your office to aggressively prosecute this case and to seek stringent penalties commensurate with the nature of the crime that will serve justice and help ensure effective rehabilitation for the alleged offender.

According to media reports, the unnamed offender was arrested after having admitted to setting on fire his neighbor's small dog, an act that led to excruciating suffering of the animal and eventually its death several days later. Fairhope veterinarian James Corte, who treated the dog, stated, "This is probably the worst case of blatant animal abuse -- malicious like this -- that I've ever seen."

While we are thankful and encouraged that Fairhope Police Detective David Martinez has chosen to file felony animal cruelty charges against the boy, describing the dog's alleged abuse as "torture," we encourage your office to uphold these charges not only so that there is accountability for such tremendous animal suffering but also so the alleged teenaged perpetrator in this case can receive the rehabilitation and help that he clearly so desperately needs.

It is well known that most of the nation's most notorious violent criminals and serial killers first practiced their violence against animals before turning against human victims. Had the criminal system addressed their actions of cruelty early on, they may not have continued their violence against others, including people.

We therefore feel that the alleged actions of this young man should be viewed as a red flag signaling the potential for future violence against others, including people. Animal abuse is widely viewed as a serious indicator of future violence against people, and appropriate intervention can interrupt the development of deviant behavior in children.

For example, a longitudinal study funded by the U.S. Department of Justice found that physical aggression toward people and animals is one of four factors associated with the

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persistence of anti-social and aggressive behavior in youths. Additionally, we know that as aggressive children get older, they are less responsive to therapeutic intervention.

While we are encouraged that felony animal cruelty charges have been filed in this case we urge your office to maintain these charges and to seek, upon conviction, significant jail time, mandatory, intensive psychological counseling and a ban on contact with animals as the rehabilitative measures necessary to help head off future acts of violence.

Although I understand that there may be reticence to vigorously prosecute young offenders, we feel it is precisely the youth of the alleged abuser that calls for stronger—not lesser—measures of intervention. Additionally, a stern prosecution of this case would send a strong message to the community that animal cruelty is a violent crime that will not be tolerated in Baldwin County.

The HSUS has decades of experience in assisting with the prosecution of animal cruelty cases, and we would like to offer our assistance in this case, as well, if you should feel it would be helpful. Should you need expert testimony or written statements regarding the implications of animal cruelty, for example, or information on psychological counseling programs designed specifically for children who abuse animals, please feel free to contact me at 757-469-2896 or dbartlett@humanesociety.org.

Sincerely,



Dale Bartlett
Deputy Manager, Animal Cruelty Campaign