

## Power of the People

Connecticut Votes for Animals is the Animals' Voice in Politics  
by Mary deManbey

Few can ignore the power individuals have when they are united around a common cause. Most recently, the election of the Democratic Party's presidential candidate is largely credited to the groundswell of individual support and grass roots activities which centered around a powerful, unifying slogan, "Yes We Can."

What if all animal lovers believed that slogan as well — that they had the power to make a difference and change the lives of animals who may be suffering?

Connecticut Votes for Animals is an exciting new organization that gives you that power. Their slogan, "Animals Don't Vote, People Do," reflects its mission – to mobilize the public to support animal rights through their political choices. Established in April 2008, as a 501(c) (4) nonprofit entity, the organization not only informs its members of important animal protection issues, but also encourages members to contact their legislators who have the power to turn animal welfare proposals into law.

A separate, yet related, entity to CT Votes for Animals is the CT Votes for Animals–Political Action Committee (PAC), which surveys candidates on their positions and ultimately endorses candidates based on their positions and voting records on animal protection issues. The resulting "scorecards" inform members of which legislators are pro-animal welfare advocates and those who may not be supportive of animal welfare bills.



Our Companions is actively engaged in CT Votes for Animals. The genesis of the organization came about through the Animal Welfare Federation of Connecticut – a collaboration of animal welfare organizations and professionals who meet to pool ideas, talents and animal-related issues. According to Susan Linker, CEO of Our Companions and Vice President of CT Votes for Animals, the new organization provides a voice for animal rights in the state's legislature.

"When we first started working with the issues, all of us in the Animal Welfare Federation realized we were fighting the same battles," Linker says. "We realized how important it was to have a united front in order to impact legislation in favor of animal protection."

In addition to her duties as a legislative liaison and lobbyist for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), Attorney Debora M. Bresch volunteers as President of the organization. As President, she oversees the legislative efforts of the organization, drafts appropriate wording affecting animal protection laws and lobbies for animal welfare legislation at the Capitol. "I'm basically the interface between the public and politics," Bresch says. As a lobbyist for the ASPCA, she says her volunteer position at CT Votes for Animals is a logical place for her, given the strong animal advocates in the state. "My first love is animals and preventing their suffering. My work in Connecticut builds on my current efforts on behalf of animals," she concludes.

## **Pending Animal Welfare Legislation**

Bresch is currently working on three important pieces of legislation. The first bill is designed to address the sale of puppies born in inhumane conditions at large dog-breeding operations called puppy mills. The bill would require that puppies sold in Connecticut pet stores come from healthy dogs who have been raised only in breeding operations that are in compliance with state laws. (Generally, Connecticut does not have large puppy mills, and most puppies sold in Connecticut pet stores come from out-of-state puppy mills, many of which have not been regulated for humane treatment of their animals.) “We want to make sure that puppies sold in Connecticut are healthy and come from dogs that are themselves healthy and well cared for,” says Bresch. “So we’re looking at pet stores, and we’re hoping that this legislation will require these stores to have proof that their dogs have been treated humanely.”

Another important piece of legislation builds upon a current anti-tethering law that prohibits unreasonable tethering and confinement of a dog. Many animal control officers have been hesitant to enforce this law due to the ambiguity around what constitutes “unreasonable.” This bill would clearly define what is considered unreasonable. “The goal is to prevent long-term tethering and improper confinement of a dog, through greater enforcement and definition of the law,” says Bresch.

A third bill hopes to increase the funding for the state’s Animal Population Control Program. Additional funding could be acquired through an increase in dog licensing funds. These funds could be obtained through animal control officers who have the authority to get rabies certificates from veterinarians. By obtaining rabies vaccination certificates, animal control officers can contact owners to enforce dog licensing requirements.

## **Why do we need this organization?**

According to Bresch, there are a number of organized minority groups who make an impact on the state legislature. Given the large number of animal advocates in Connecticut, Connecticut Votes for Animals could have a huge impact on legislation around animal issues. “Our power thus far has not been equal to our numbers,” she says. “The goal is to really create a political presence for animals and the people who care about them at the legislature.”

Linker echoes this belief. “The real power is in the voting booth,” she says. “Most lawmakers will pay attention if they get as little as five messages from their constituents. We want to mobilize the voting public to talk to their legislators. We know people care but that caring isn’t being translated into political action.”

If you are an animal lover who wants to know more about animal welfare issues, and who in your legislature can help change take place that will safeguard the lives of animals, then all you have to do is become a member of Connecticut Votes for Animals. Membership is simple. Go to [www.ctvotesforanimals.org](http://www.ctvotesforanimals.org).

Can you make a difference? To quote a well-worn phrase, “Yes you can!”

## **More About Connecticut Votes for Animals**

### **Key Legislation - Bill Names**

Dog Chaining Bill:

AN ACT PROHIBITING THE UNREASONABLE CONFINEMENT AND TETHERING OF DOGS

Puppy Mill Bill:

AN ACT CONCERNING DOGS AND CATS SOLD IN CONNECTICUT

Spay/Neuter Bill to increase funding to the Animal Population Control Program (APCP) program:

AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICERS AND THE RELEASE OF RABIES VACCINATION RECORDS

### **Benefits of Membership in CT Votes for Animals**

- E-mail action alerts.
- Access to breaking news and information on key issues, the political process and animal-related legislation.
- Ability to view candidate responses to our legislative issues questionnaire.
- Ability to view and add your organization's events to our Calendar of Events.
- Ability to view the CT Votes for Animals' Scorecard detailing legislators records on animal issues.