

# Senate Judiciary Committee

*Declan Donahue 271-3324*

**SB 619-FN**, establishing procedures for expedited court hearings and disposition of confiscated animals.

**Hearing Date:** February 12, 2026

**Time Opened:** 1:44 p.m.

**Time Closed:** 2:04 p.m.

**Members of the Committee Present:** Senators Gannon, Abbas, Carson, Altschiller and Reardon

**Members of the Committee Absent :** None

**Bill Analysis:** This bill establishes procedures for expedited court hearings and disposition of animals confiscated due to allegations of animal cruelty.

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**Sponsors:**

Sen. Abbas

Sen. Avarad

Sen. Sullivan

Sen. McGough

Sen. Watters

Sen. Murphy

Sen. Innis

Sen. Birdsell

Rep. Alexander Jr.

Rep. C. Harvey

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**Who supports the bill:** 30 people signed up in support of this bill. Please contact Brendan Bunnell ([brendan.bunnell@gc.nh.gov](mailto:brendan.bunnell@gc.nh.gov)) for a comprehensive list.

**Who opposes the bill:** 13 people signed up in opposition to this bill. Please contact Brendan Bunnell ([brendan.bunnell@gc.nh.gov](mailto:brendan.bunnell@gc.nh.gov)) for a comprehensive list.

**Summary of testimony presented in support:**

Senator Daryl Abbas (Senate District 22)

- This bill was made in collaboration with multiple different interest groups.
- There is an amendment to this bill that makes minor housekeeping changes.
- This bill creates a clear procedure for when an animal is confiscated in an animal cruelty case, and creates a clear and concise timeline, eliminating procedural gaps that can get expensive.
- Senator Altschiller stated this is a very prescriptive bill, and asked what the inciting incident was for including this amount of prescriptive language in statute.
- There was no specific incident for the Senator, as this came from collaboration with law enforcement and the Humane Society.

- Senator Carson expressed concern that when shelters take on multiple animals who were being mistreated, the veterinary bills can be quite expensive. She asked if the purpose of the charge to the person whose animal it was that they had to take is to offset those costs for the shelter.
- If someone is charged for this, and their animal is confiscated, they are basically posting a bond to the court like in a civil forfeiture hearing.
- Senator Carson asked about the details of the amendment.
- Senator Reardon stated that when you place a bond, it is to ensure performance, she asked who ends up with the bond, and if it is liquidated to cover the cost for the person that is holding the animal.
- It would depend on the outcome of the case. Senator Abbas stated he would have to look more into the procedure on this to answer that question.
- Senator Altschiller asked about if the accused fails to appear in court without giving prior notice within 3 days of hearing date and no evidence of emerging circumstances, and how we make sure someone does not repeatedly attain 3 day extensions.
- The court has to approve these, but there are ways people delay trials, however those wrongful tactics do not often make it by.

Lisa Dennison (New Hampshire Federation of Humane Organizations)

- This bill establishes the 14 day status hearing, following 2 cases that took nearly 100 animals before the criminal proceedings concluded, during which the animals struggled to maintain their behavioral health in the prolonged shelter environment while massive costs accrued to the state.
- The processes, as they are now, hurts both the behavioral and physical health of animals while imposing astronomical costs on defendants.
- The original intent of the 14 day hearing was to streamline animal confiscation cases by creating a priority timeline and clear financial mechanism to ensure financial care.
- This bill enables the court to address time sensitive animal care issues, as was originally intended with this process.
- At the time of seizure, many owners do not understand the financial burden they face if found guilty, and this 14 day period gives the opportunity for dialogue about the care of animals who have been abused or are held in protective custody.
- It also provides a mechanism to transfer custody to a co-owner to save months of an animal living in a shelter.
- Hearings on critical matters will be enabled to be conducted even if the defendant fails to appear or notify the court, preventing months of delay where animals remain in legal uncertainty.
- Ms. Dennison urges the committee to pass the bill as amended.

### **Summary of testimony presented in opposition:**

Patricia Norris (Governor's Commission on the Humane Treatment of Animals)

- Ms. Norris practiced animal law for over 20 years, teaches animal law at the University of New Hampshire, and chaired the Governor's Commission for the Humane Treatment of Animals for 13 years.
- As written, the Governor's Commission on the Humane Treatment of Animals had concerns about the bill, but would support the bill with the amendment.
- In her personal capacity, Ms. Norris supports the bill only as amended.
- This bill came about as courts were unaware of their authority and the procedures due to the uniqueness of animal cruelty cases.
- For animal cruelty cases, evidence cannot be stashed away, and the care for the animal gets very expensive. These costs fall onto the towns and taxpayers if there is no conviction.
- If the confiscation is lawful under probable cause, the court can consider any issue specific to the case brought up by either party.
- Until there is a conviction, and the appeal period has passed, the court does not have the authority to transfer ownership, but determine custody. This was addressed in the amendment.
- The bond provision in the bill is permissive, not mandatory.
- The accused must appear in court, not necessarily the owner, which could leave the animal in limbo if the accused does not appear. The court, in this case, may make a ruling on certain custody motions.
- Senator Reardon asked about the bond, and how the proceeds of the bonds would be transferred.
- That language could use improving. If there is no finding of guilt, the bond would be returned, and if there is a finding of guilt it would go toward the cost of care.

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Date Hearing Report completed: February 13, 2026