

Westminster Private Members' Pet Abduction Bill



USPCA Written Submission
7 May 2024

About the USPCA

The USPCA is the second oldest animal welfare charity in the world. It has a primary focus of rescuing, rehabilitating and rehoming or releasing animals across Northern Ireland.

- We have been on hand to protect animals and prevent cruelty for almost two centuries.
- We champion animal welfare and encourage respect and kindness for animals across society.
- We campaign and advocate for legislative and government policy change that advances animal welfare.
- We educate people of all ages about the welfare of animals.
- We help to bring those who abuse animals to justice through our special investigation work.
- We are proud to be at the forefront of preventing cruelty to animals.
- We care for, rescue, rehabilitate, release, and rehome animals across NI.

To find out more about our work please visit our website.

<https://www.uspca.co.uk>

The Pet Abduction Bill response

The USPCA welcomes the introduction of The Pet Abduction Bill which will address the fact there is no legislation specifically addressing pet theft in NI.

Currently when an animal is stolen, in law, it is viewed in the same way as when property is taken ie the theft of a mobile phone, laptop or power tool. The existing law fails to fully consider animal welfare or the impact on pet owners of a crime that can be devastating.

Therefore, the USPCA welcomes legislation which will more accurately recognise the emotional significance of losing an animal in this way. Strengthening the law to make pet theft an offence will provide an effective deterrent to those who might consider pet abduction a low-risk, high-reward crime. We would encourage the legislation to be extended to recognise all pet companions as set out in point three.

The perpetrators who commit to stealing a pet will have no regard for the welfare of the animal but instead their interest is purely about making a profit, therefore this must be taken into account and they should be sentenced accordingly. Therefore, when the Bill is enacted in its current form then maximum sentencing must be employed by the Courts so that the Bill acts as a true deterrent to discourage criminals from stealing animals.

It is anticipated that this will provide opportunities to improve data recording of the crime also. Legislation that will enable better tracking and data collection on pet abduction cases. By having reliable information and processes in place, this will help to highlight any trends in breeds or geographical areas and allow for preventative measures to be put in place. Prevention will always be better than cure and the Bill would help track crime levels and help to develop more effective prevention strategies.

We view these as positive steps forward to advance animal welfare to enshrine in a law a purpose-made offence for pet theft will ensure that those who steal pets are punished accordingly.

We believe that the Bill has the potential to highlight the statutory requirements around the microchipping of dogs and act as a catalyst to review current systems and databases so that they align and there is more opportunity to reunite pet and owner or identify an owner where an abused dog comes into our care.

There may also be future provision to include the recommendations of the Pet Theft Taskforceⁱ around strengthening microchipping databases and rules. The USPCA would support a review of the current microchipping recording system as there are a number of different manufacturers producing microchips and databases. The numerous systems to record microchip data do not align with each other which means that if a dog is scanned for a microchip, then the registered information may not show up as the correct database have not been accessed. We would support one National Microchipping Database that all enforcement agencies, veterinary practices and animal welfare charities could access. There is a choice of 14 national databases on which to register petsⁱⁱ. These databases do not share their data with one other and there is no central database or portal.

More widely there is an opportunity for DEARA to introduce legislation to introduce the compulsory microchipping of pet cats in NI. This increases the likelihood of lost or stolen cats being reunited with their owner. From

the 10 June the microchipping acts becomes compulsory in England and Wales.

Alongside the Bill, an education campaign for pet owners should be rolled out letting people know how they can keep pets safe and reminding the public that they should have their dog microchipped by law with up-to-date details so that there is a much greater chance of them being identified and returned to their owner. There is an opportunity for enforcement agencies to work together to better coordinate and share best practice and advice on the steps owners can take to protect their pets. This should be done alongside animal welfare charities to raise awareness and educate pet owners on the importance of microchipping your pets, improving traceability.

Lastly, it is important to highlight the need for appropriate enforcement resources are available to enforce legislation to advance animal welfare.

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6130fa358fa8f5032d8d178f/Pet Theft Taskforce Report GOV.UK PDF.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6130fa358fa8f5032d8d178f/Pet_Theft_Taskforce_Report_GOV_UK_PDF.pdf)

ii <https://www.bva.co.uk/take-action/our-policies/dog-microchipping/>