

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Regulated Industries

BILL: SB 468

INTRODUCER: Senator Wright

SUBJECT: Animal Cruelty

DATE: February 9, 2026

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Baird	Imhof	RI	Pre-meeting
2.			CJ	
3.			RC	

I. Summary:

SB 468 establishes mandatory reporting requirements for veterinarians if animal cruelty is suspected. Additionally, the bill clarifies that veterinarians can provide medical patient records to authorities if a veterinarian suspects animal cruelty as defined in s. 828.124, F.S.

The bill creates a new section of law dealing with reporting animal cruelty where clarifying definitions are provided for the terms “animal cruelty,” “animal treatment provider” and “good faith report.” Additionally, the bill creates a new duty for veterinarians, with exceptions, to report suspected, both past or ongoing, incidents of animal cruelty to a local law enforcement officer, an animal control officer certified pursuant to s. 828.27(4)(a), F.S., or an agent appointed under s. 828.03, F.S.

The bill provides that its provisions may not be construed to prohibit any person from making a good faith report of suspected animal cruelty to any national, state, or local law enforcement authority or any animal control agency.

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2026.

II. Present Situation:

Animal Cruelty

Animal cruelty is increasingly recognized as a “bridge crime” linked to domestic violence and child abuse.¹ Florida’s animal protection statutes are primarily housed in Chapter 828, F.S.

¹ Animal Legal Defense Fund, *The Link Between Cruelty to Animals and Violence Toward Humans*, available at <https://aldf.org/article/the-link-between-cruelty-to-animals-and-violence-toward-humans-2/#:~:text=Indeed%2C%20a%201983%20study%20notes,been%20inflicted%20on%20the%20child>. (last visited Feb. 6, 2026).

Animal cruelty is broadly defined and categorized based on the severity and intent of the act. Section 828.02, F.S., defines “animal” to include every living dumb creature and the word “cruelty” to mean every act, omission, or neglect whereby unnecessary or unjustifiable pain or suffering is caused, except when done in the interest of medical science, permitted, or allowed to continue when there is reasonable remedy or relief.

Florida law distinguishes between misdemeanor animal cruelty and aggravated animal cruelty (a third-degree felony). These laws cover a variety of offenses including animal fighting², killing or wounding registered breed dogs³, and confinement or abandonment.⁴ While Florida has robust penalties for these crimes, the legal framework for identifying these crimes often relies on law enforcement or animal control officers observing the conditions firsthand or receiving voluntary reports from the public.

Section 828.12(1), F.S., provides first degree misdemeanor penalties⁵ for cases involving cruelty to animals. A person commits the crime of animal cruelty if he or she:

- Unnecessarily overloads;
- Overdrives;
- Torments;
- Deprives of necessary sustenance or shelter;
- Unnecessarily mutilates, or kills any animal, or causes such to be done; or
- Carries in or upon any vehicle, or otherwise, any animal in a cruel or inhumane manner.

Section 828.12(2), F.S., specifies that a person who intentionally commits an act to any animal, or a person who owns or has the custody or control of any animal and fails to act, which results in the cruel death, or excessive or repeated infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering, or causes the same to be done, commits aggravated animal cruelty, a felony of the third degree.⁶

Section 828.13(3), F.S., states that any person who is the owner or possessor, or has charge or custody, of any animal who abandons such animal to suffer injury or malnutrition or abandons any animal in a street, road, or public place without providing for the care, sustenance, protection, and shelter of such animal commits a misdemeanor of the first degree.⁷

Additionally, a person may not knowingly:

- Engage in any sexual contact with an animal;
- Cause, aid, or abet another person to engage in any sexual contact with an animal;
- Permit any sexual contact with an animal to be conducted on any premises under his or her charge or control;

² Section 828.122, F.S.

³ Section 828.126, F.S.

⁴ Section 828.13, F.S.

⁵ A first degree misdemeanor is punishable by up to 1 year in the county jail or a \$5,000 fine or both. Sections 775.082 and 775.083, F.S.

⁶ A third degree felony is punishable by up to 5 years' imprisonment and a \$5,000 fine. Sections 775.082 and 775.083, F.S. However, a violation of s. 828.12(2), F.S., may result in a fine of up to \$10,000. Sections 775.083(1)(g) and 828.12(2), F.S.

⁷ A first degree misdemeanor is punishable by up to 1 year in the county jail or a \$1,000 fine or both. Sections 775.082 and 775.083, F.S. However, a violation of s. 828.13(3), F.S., may result in a fine of up to \$5,000. Sections 775.083(1)(g) and 828.13(3), F.S.

- Organize, promote, conduct, aid, abet, participate in as an observer, or advertise, offer, solicit, or accept an offer of an animal for the purpose of sexual contact with such animal, or perform any service in the furtherance of an act involving any sexual contact with an animal; or
- Film, distribute, or possess any pornographic image or video of a person and an animal engaged in any of the activities prohibited by this section.⁸

A person who violates this section commits a felony of the third degree.⁹

In 2025, the Legislature passed “Dexter’s Law” that created a statewide animal abuser registry that maintains names of those individuals who have been convicted of, or who have entered a plea of guilty or nolo contendere to animal abuse, regardless of how the case is ultimately adjudicated.¹⁰

Mandatory Reporting Duties for Animal Cruelty

Presently, the *only* category of people in Florida that have a legal mandatory reporting duty, in regard to animal cruelty, are child protective investigators.

Under s. 39.208, F.S., child protective investigators are required to report suspected animal cruelty observed during a child abuse investigation. The authority that the child protective investigators must report to is the local animal control agency.¹¹

Any county, society, or association for the prevention of cruelty to children or animals may appoint agents for the purposes of investigating violations of ch. 468, F.S., or any other law to protect and prevent cruelty to children or animals.¹² All appointments of the agents of these societies or corporations must have the approval of the mayor of the city in which the society or association exists, and if the society or association exists or works outside of any city, the appointment must be approved by the county court judge or the judge of the circuit court for the county, and the mayor or judge shall keep a record of such appointment.¹³ The approval of the appointment of any agent by a county for either the incorporated or unincorporated areas of such county shall be by the county commission.¹⁴

Any appointed animal control officers must report suspected child abuse.¹⁵

⁸ Sexual activities involving animals. Section 828.126, F.S.

⁹ A third degree felony is punishable by up to 5 years’ imprisonment and a \$5,000 fine. Sections 775.082 and 775.083, F.S.

¹⁰ See ch. 2025-102, Laws of Fla., (codified at Section 828.12(7), F.S., effective July 1, 2025) [beginning January 1, 2026, the Department of Law Enforcement shall post on its website, in a searchable format prescribed by the department, the names of those individuals who have been convicted of, or who have entered a plea of guilty or nolo contendere to, regardless of adjudication, a violation of this section.

¹¹ Section 39.208(2)(a), F.S.

¹² Section 828.03(1), F.S.

¹³ Section 828.03(2), F.S.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ Section 39.208(3), F.S.

Practice of Veterinary Medicine

The Board of Veterinary Medicine (board) within the Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) implements the provisions of ch. 474, F.S., relating to veterinary medical practice (practice act). The purpose of the practice act is to ensure that every veterinarian practicing in this state meets minimum requirements for safe practices to protect public health and safety.¹⁶

A “veterinarian” is a health care practitioner licensed by the board to engage in the practice of veterinary medicine in Florida¹⁷ and they are subject to disciplinary action from the board for various violations of the practice act.¹⁸

The practice of “veterinary medicine” is the diagnosis of medical conditions of animals, and the prescribing or administering of medicine and treatment to animals for the prevention, cure, or relief of a wound, fracture, bodily injury, or disease, or holding oneself out as performing any of these functions.¹⁹

By virtue of accepting a license to practice veterinary medicine in Florida, a veterinarian consents to:

- Render a handwriting sample to an agent of the DBPR and, further, to have waived any objections to its use as evidence against her or him.
- Waive the confidentiality and authorize the preparation and release of medical reports pertaining to the mental or physical condition of the licensee when the DBPR has reason to believe that a violation of this chapter has occurred and when the DBPR issues an order, based on the need for additional information, to produce such medical reports for the time period relevant to the complaint.²⁰

For Fiscal Year 2023-2024, there were 13,392 actively licensed veterinarians in Florida. The DBPR received 611 complaints, which resulted in 44 disciplinary actions.²¹

The Board of Veterinary Medicine

The board consists of seven members that are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.²² Five members of the board must be licensed veterinarians, and two members of the board must be laypersons who are not and have never been veterinarians or members of any closely related profession or occupation.²³

¹⁶ Section 474.201, F.S.

¹⁷ Section 474.202(11), F.S.

¹⁸ Sections 474.213 and 474.214, F.S.

¹⁹ Section 474.202(9), F.S. Also included is the determination of the health, fitness, or soundness of an animal, and the performance of any manual procedure for the diagnosis or treatment of pregnancy or fertility or infertility of animals.

²⁰ Section 474.2185, F.S.

²¹ Department of Business and Professional Regulation, *Division of Professions Annual Report Fiscal Year 2023-2024*, <https://www2.myfloridalicense.com/os/documents/Division%20Annual%20Report%20FY%2023-24.pdf> (last visited Feb. 6, 2026).

²² Section 474.204(1), F.S.

²³ Section 474.204(2), F.S.

The board is required, like all boards regulated under ch. 455, F.S., to meet at least once annually and may meet as often as is necessary.²⁴ There is currently one vacancy on the board.²⁵

The board is legally authorized to impose disciplinary sanctions against licensees who violate the standards for the profession.²⁶ Under current law, the board may take action for various grounds including, but not limited to, negligence, fraud, or a criminal conviction for animal cruelty.²⁷

When a veterinarian is found guilty of a violation, the board has the power to do the following:²⁸

- Enter an order denying a license;
- Revoke or suspend a license;
- Issue an administrative fine not to exceed \$5,000 for each count or separate offense;
- Issue a formal reprimand;
- Place the veterinarian on probation for a period of time and subject to such conditions as the board may specify, including requiring the veterinarian to attend continuing education courses or to work under the supervision of another veterinarian;
- Restrict the authorized scope of practice;
- Impose costs of the investigation and prosecution; and
- Require the veterinarian to undergo remedial education.

The specific ranges of these penalties for each violation are further codified in the Florida Administrative Code to ensure consistency in disciplinary actions.²⁹ The determination as to whether probable cause exists to believe that a violation of the provisions of Florida Statute or of the board's rules has occurred, requires a vote by a probable cause panel to take place.³⁰

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1 of the bill amends s. 474.214, F.S., relating to disciplinary proceedings for veterinarians by the board. The bill expands what the board can discipline veterinarians for by adding the action of “failing to report suspected animal cruelty to the proper authorities pursuant to s. 828.124, F.S.”

Section 2 of the bill amends s. 474.2165, F.S., relating to ownership and control of veterinary medical patient records, to clarify that veterinarians may disclose private patient records when they suspect animal cruelty, as defined in the newly created s. 828.124, F.S.

Section 3 of the bill creates s. 828.124, F.S., relating to reporting animal cruelty.

²⁴ Section 455.207(3), F.S.

²⁵ Department of Business & Professional Regulation Board Member Appointments, Updated March 2025, https://www2.myfloridalicense.com/pro/vetm/documents/vet_board.pdf (last visited Feb. 6, 2026).

²⁶ See Section 474.214, F.S.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ Section 474.214(2)(a)-(h), F.S.

²⁹ See Fla. Admin. Code R. 61G18-30.001-30.006 (2025).

³⁰ Fla. Admin. Code R. 61G18-10.008 (2025).

Definitions

The bill defines the following terms:

- Animal cruelty – any act or omission that constitutes a violation of s.828.12, s. 828.122, s. 828.126, or s. 828.13, F.S.
- Animal treatment provider to include:
 - Any animal care facility, hospital, mobile service or clinic, or shelter;
 - A private veterinary practice;
 - A college of veterinary medicine or veterinary technology program;
 - A specialized veterinary hospital; or
 - Any place dogs or cats are seen for any kind of treatment; and
- Good faith report - a report of animal cruelty which is made by a person without malice or consideration of personal benefit who has probable cause to believe such a report is true.

Duty to Report

The bill requires the report of past or ongoing suspected incidents of animal cruelty to a local law enforcement officer, an animal control officer certified pursuant to s. 828.27(4)(a) F.S., or an agent appointed under s. 828.03, F.S., to be made by the following people:

- A veterinarian, if he or she has a veterinarian/client/patient relationship with the animal; or
- A veterinary technician employed by an animal treatment provider or any other employee of the animal treatment provider, if the animal is a past or current patient of the animal treatment provider with whom the technician or employee is employed;

Good Faith Exception

A veterinarian, veterinary technician, or other animal treatment provider employee who makes a good faith report of animal cruelty pursuant to this section to a local law enforcement officer, an animal control officer, or an agent appointed pursuant to subsection (2) shall be held harmless from criminal liability, civil liability, professional disciplinary action, and employer retaliation.

A veterinarian, excluding veterinarians subject to chapter 474, F.S., a veterinary technician, or an animal treatment provider employee or volunteer, who knowingly alters or destroys a medical record for the purpose of concealing or attempting to conceal animal cruelty or who causes the same to be done, commits a misdemeanor of the first degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082 or s. 775.083, F.S. It appears that this provision only applies to veterinarians not licensed in Florida.

The bill provides that's provisions may not be construed to prohibit any person from making a good faith report of suspected animal cruelty to any national, state, or local law enforcement authority or any animal control agency.

Effective Date

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2026.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

This could potentially increase the workload for the Board of Veterinary Medicine within the Department of Business and Professional Regulation for having to investigate and discipline for violations of the newly created animal cruelty reporting requirements.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

In **Section 3** of the bill, the term “veterinary technician” is used; that term does not exist in Florida Statute.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends sections 474.214 and 474.2165 of the Florida Statutes.

This bill creates section 828.124 of the Florida Statutes.

IX. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
