



Office of the Attorney General
Washington, D. C. 20530

February 18, 2026

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE EMPLOYEES

FROM: THE ATTORNEY GENERAL *PH*

SUBJECT: PRIORITIZATION OF ANIMAL WELFARE ENFORCEMENT

Animal cruelty represents a criminal threat that continues to escalate. Animal fighting operations have expanded beyond small-scale, opportunistic actions to coordinated enterprises involving multifarious criminal groups. The Internet has facilitated the proliferation of animal torture videos that are created and distributed both domestically and internationally.

In addition to the unspeakable cruelty imposed on the animals themselves by these crimes, the link between animal abuse and abuse perpetrated against human beings has been clearly established. And animal cruelty is often accompanied by other criminal activity, including drug- and gang-related activity.

In order to enhance our efforts to combat animal welfare crimes, I am pleased to announce the following initiatives.

1. Animal Welfare Summit

The Department will host a one-week summit to address prosecuting animal welfare crimes. This summit will be organized and led by the Environment and Natural Resource Division's (ENRD) Environmental Crimes Section (ECS) and Executive Office for United States Attorneys (EOUSA). The summit will be held at the National Advocacy Center in Columbia, South Carolina. Each United States Attorney's Office (USAO) will be invited to send one attorney, and each FBI field office will be invited to send one special agent. Instructors will be experienced animal welfare prosecutors and special agents, as well as representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the U.S. Marshall's Service, and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). State law enforcement experts and experts from non-governmental organizations will also be invited to share their expertise and experience.

The summit will cover four animal welfare statutes: (1) The Animal Fighting Venture Prohibition Act; (2) The Animal Welfare Act; (3) The Crush Video Statute; and (4) The Humane Slaughter Act. The summit will include segments on investigative best practices, care and

feeding of seized animals, asset forfeiture, coordination in multi-jurisdictional cases, and sentencing issues.

2. Animal Welfare Executive Strategy Committee

The Department will create an Animal Welfare Executive Strategic Committee (ESC). The ESC will be chaired by the Assistant Attorney General of the Environment and Natural Resources Division and include executives from USDA, EOUSA, the FBI, the U.S. Marshall's Service, and HSI.

The ESC, which will meet no less than semiannually and no later than 90 days from today, shall: (1) develop and implement a National Strategy for Combating Animal Welfare Crimes; (2) collaborate to efficiently implement that strategy; (3) coordinate to ensure the efficient use of resources; and (4) identify enforcement challenges and make recommendations to overcome those challenges.

The ESC shall issue an annual report detailing its accomplishments and setting forth its strategy for the forthcoming year. The ESC may solicit input from non-governmental organizations in devising its strategy.

The ESC will also supervise the creation of an Animal Welfare Prosecutions manual to be distributed throughout the Department to assist prosecutors.

3. Tiger Team

The Department will recommend the creation of a law enforcement "tiger team" to participate in and assist with the execution of search warrants and seizures in animal welfare cases. The team shall be made up of a cross-functional group of experts trained in the forensic evaluation and care of animals involved in animal fighting and other animal welfare statutes. These experts will help coordinate the initial seizure and documentation of seized animals, triage the animals to determine required veterinary care, and testify as experts in cases that later go to trial. USDA will have the initial responsibility for identifying these experts from within USDA and will work with the Department to ensure they receive the necessary training.

By identifying experts from within the U.S. Government, we will save significant funds currently being expended on outside experts in individual cases.

4. Dedicated Seizure Fund

The Department will recommend the continued use of the Asset Forfeiture Fund to pay for the evaluation, care, and feeding of animals seized in all animal welfare cases. Prosecutors will be required to utilize all available forfeiture authorities and work with ENRD's Wildlife and Marine Resources Section to ensure the welfare of seized animals is maximized, while the attendant costs are minimized.

5. Office of Justice Program (OJP) Grants

The Department of Justice, through OJP, will offer grants for animal welfare groups, and for our state and local law enforcement partners who are taking action to end animal cruelty.