

Senate bills would make sex with animals a crime

■ SB 227 would criminalize bestiality, while SB 230 would increase Oregon's penalties for any abuse of animals

By Sue Ryan
Oregon Daily Emerald

Oregon legislators are attempting to crack down on people who commit offenses against animals through two Senate bills currently making their way through the Legislature.

SB 227 would create the crime of sexual assault of an animal, while SB 230 would increase penalties and change the severity of offenses for abuse against animals.

Sen. John Minnis, R-Fairview, and the bill's co-sponsor, Sen. Peter Courtney, D-Salem/Keizer, said the push for the bill came about because of a current loophole in Oregon's laws. A public hearing on SB 227 will be held today at 5 p.m. in Salem before the Oregon Legislature.

"There is nothing in Oregon law that prevents bestiality," Minnis said. "Not under neglect, not under abuse."

Courtney's office amassed a file of reported incidents, including sexual abuse cases involving

miniature horses and dogs.

The bill's language defines an action as sexual assault if a person touches or contacts (or causes another person or object to contact) the mouth, anus, or sex organs of an animal for the purpose of arousing or gratifying that person's sexual desire. It would also allow courts to order psychiatric evaluations and counseling for youth offenders.

"Children who abuse animals physically grow up to abuse adults physically," said Judge Paul Lipscomb, the presiding judge for Marion County. "It's the same with sexually deviant behaviors in children."

Lipscomb has heard cases in his courtroom dealing with the issue, but he said it is not a large problem.

"No more than one-half of 1 percent of the population are involved in cases like these," he said. "But it allows us, particularly with youth, in getting those issues out of the closet and have them getting treatment."

The Humane Society of the Willamette Valley, located in Salem, also tracks sexual abuse incidents.

"We've had a couple of cases here in Marion County," said Wayne Geiger, the society's animal welfare director. "I don't think [current] penalties fit death and suffering of the animal."

The society has stated its public support for both SB 227 and 230.

"Sometimes it's pretty frustrating, especially when we see repeat

cases," Geiger said, referring to SB 230. "These are people we've already educated once, and they repeat the animal abuse."

SB 230 would also close a loophole in current law by changing the definition of physical injury for animal abuse and neglect statutes.

"It would elevate several charges to felonies, where previously only one was a felony," said Susan Harmon, director of the Oregon Humane Society. "Whether you are using women or children or animals for this, we're simply talking about violence."

The bill would also prohibit offenders from owning animals for a certain period of time following a conviction. Sen. Ryan Deckert, D-Beaverton, introduced the bill on behalf of Connie Hawes, who has been involved with animal rehabilitation for 10 years. Hawes said the impetus for the bill came from the abuse of Rose-Tu at the Portland Zoo.

"The keeper inflicted 176 stab and puncture wounds with misuse of the ankus [prod with a hook] to her," she said. "But they didn't prosecute because Oregon law was restructured to align with human abuse laws."

Hawes explained that under human abuse laws the precedent set required the victim to testify about how long the abuse had been occurring. Since animals can't speak, they could not testify, Hawes said.

SB 230 has just been introduced and has yet to be scheduled for a hearing.

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