

Readers Respond

Regarding the *Bellwether* article, “High Noon for Animal Rights Law: The Coming Showdown between Pet Owners and Guardians,” Susan Finkelstein did an excellent job with this article prompting in-depth thought on this matter, owner vs. guardian. As an active animal advocate, there are some comments that Susan has made that need clarification by those of us who consistently deal with issues of animal welfare/rights.

For example, on page 18: “Today, anti-cruelty laws exist at the state and federal levels. . . . While this sounds good, it is far from the truth. The AWA at the federal level, if you have read it, is vague and invites interpretation. Enforcement of it is strictly in the hands of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. When you have written or called the USDA repeatedly regarding the welfare of a needy animal or group of animals for years and nothing is done, you do not have much faith in the law or those chosen to enforce it. . . .

While the article raised wonderful issues regarding animal ownership vs. guardianship, animal law must eventually encompass all of them. That may as well be dealt with now, rather than later. Another huge issue is enforce-

ment of law. The other issue, perhaps most important, which no one is addressing, is the rampant intentional or unintentional breeding of animals. . . .

If veterinary schools, animal advocates, and lawyers could establish an agreeable and comprehensive language covering the keeping of any animal by any individual or organization, we would all be well on our way to progress for all parties concerned. Our system of government does not offer a blanket solution to any particular problem when the federal government enacts law to suit its needs and individual states do likewise. Animals are everywhere. The injustice to them will continue to be fought by concerned people who feel they must speak in behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves. In doing so, laws will be enacted, sporadically, that will affect citizens and veterinarians adversely.

—LAURA COTTER
FRANKLINVILLE, NJ

The summer 2005 issue detailed the legal system’s involvement in what until now has always been a natural understanding of (mostly rural) humans—a “pet” is always around, whether a canine, feline, or caged bird. This domesticated pet is as precious as our children. It is considered personal property, but more than an inanimate object. However, the feeling of responsibility rests with those who care for this pet. Loss of the animal is met with heartfelt feelings similar to those experienced at the funeral of any relative.

The legal system is considering giving a legal status to this person–pet relationship. It’s very simple: if this relationship is “caregiver,” it requires no litigation. If somehow a case comes up involving the above, then let the judge decide. Let’s keep animal righteous people out of this simple family issue with respectful understanding of daily life and not involve the legal system.

—MRS. JOHN B. HANNUM, SR.
UNIONVILLE, PA

Editor’s note

In the Spring 2005 *Bellwether*, I promised you changes, and with this edition, I’m pleased to bring you a totally redesigned publication. We have streamlined our pages, updated our look and rebuilt our Web site. Thanks to your responses to our readership survey, we have a better understanding of the content you would like to see and the format you would like to see it in. My sincere thanks to all who responded.

You’ll see that our articles are shorter, the photos are bigger and our look cleaner. Our goal continues to be to provide you with a high-quality, well-designed magazine delivering content that matters to you, our readers.

Something else new is an advertisement on the back of our cover. We’re pleased to work with our Penn Annual Conference partners by offering this opportunity to share

useful information to our readers. In addition, watch for changes in our online version of *Bellwether*, which now links to our Special Gifts column at www.vet.upenn.edu. *bu*

But most of all, we’re excited to share with you the first message from our new dean, **Dr. Joan Hendricks, V’79, GR’80**, one of the only female deans of a school of veterinary medicine in the country. We also hope you will enjoy our interview with **Dr. Laurie Landeau, V’84, WG’84**, the first veterinarian on the University of Pennsylvania’s Board of Trustees. We hope you will find the rest of our content just as engaging, and we look forward to your comments.

—GAIL LUCIANI

