

Full-time Prosecutor to Litigate Animal Cruelty Cases Statewide

In late March, Benton County District Attorney John Haroldson announced that his office has received a three-year grant to hire a full-time prosecutor who will litigate animal cruelty cases across the state.

The grant, funded by the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF), stipulates that the DA's Corvallis office will serve as the project's headquarters and fiscal agent. Haroldson said that he hoped to fill the position by the end of April. Once retained, the "dedicated animal cruelty prosecutor" would be eligible for appointment as a special deputy district attorney by any DA who needs such a case to be handled. There is no charge for the service since the attorney's time is covered by the award.

For most Oregon district attorneys, budgets have been cut to the point that animal cruelty cases are simply not getting to court. Furlough days, reduced court hours, and cuts in corrections spending have compromised the justice system. The Oregon Legislature has repeatedly and consistently articulated a strong public policy favoring the aggressive prosecution of animal cruelty cases by enacting statutes requiring police officers to make arrests in cases of animal abuse and to pay for and provide care to victim animals, as well as requiring veterinarians to report aggravated animal abuse.

"This new statewide prosecutor will handle every type of animal cruelty case — from juvenile offenders who kill a neighbor's cat to organized dog-fighting rings and subsequent racketeering prosecutions," Haroldson says. "There is now no reason why any viable animal cruelty case should go unprosecuted in Oregon."

Scott Heiser, former Benton County district attorney and current director of ALDF's Criminal Justice Program, says the award carries great significance in Oregon and, potentially, nationwide.

"When we began this process, I had one goal in mind: to ensure that animal cruelty cases are not among the growing list of crimes that go unprosecuted in Oregon," he says. "This grant is a huge step forward in Oregon, and this project will serve as a model to implement in other states." 

Source: Benton County District Attorney's Office