



General Assembly

**Substitute Bill No. 5264**

February Session, 2026



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**AN ACT CONCERNING SERVICE ANIMALS IN INSURANCE UNDERWRITING, THE APPOINTMENT OF AN ADVOCATE IN PROCEEDINGS CONCERNING THE WELFARE OR CUSTODY OF COMPANION ANIMALS, ASSAULT OF A DOMESTIC ANIMAL AND ESTABLISHING AN ANIMAL ABUSE TASK FORCE.**

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) No insurer that delivers,  
2 issues for delivery, renews, amends or endorses a homeowners or  
3 tenants insurance policy in this state on or after October 1, 2026, shall  
4 cancel, refuse to renew or refuse to issue such policy solely on the basis  
5 of the breed of dog owned by the insured or the applicant, with respect  
6 to any dog that is a dog trained or being trained as a service animal to  
7 assist blind, deaf or mobility impaired persons. As used in this section,  
8 "service animal" has the same meaning as provided in section 22-345 of  
9 the general statutes.

10 Sec. 2. Section 54-86n of the general statutes is repealed and the  
11 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2026*):

12 (a) For the purposes of this section, "companion animal" means a  
13 domesticated dog, cat, horse, rabbit, ferret, bird, rodent, fish, reptile,  
14 amphibian or other species of animal kept for pleasure rather than  
15 utility and that is normally kept in or near the household of its owner or  
16 keeper and is dependent on a person for food, shelter and veterinary

17 care, but does not include a dog, cat, horse, rabbit, ferret, bird, rodent,  
18 fish, reptile, amphibian or other species of animal kept for farming or  
19 biomedical research practices.

20 [(a)] (b) In any prosecution under section 53-247, as amended by this  
21 act, or in any court proceeding pursuant to section 22-329a or in the  
22 criminal session of the Superior Court regarding the welfare or custody  
23 of a [cat or dog] companion animal, the court may order, upon its own  
24 initiative or upon request of a party or counsel for a party, that a  
25 separate advocate be appointed to represent the interests of justice. If a  
26 court orders that an advocate be appointed to represent the interests of  
27 justice, the court shall appoint such advocate from a list provided to the  
28 court by the Commissioner of Agriculture pursuant to subsection [(c)]  
29 (d) of this section. A decision by the court denying a request to appoint  
30 a separate advocate to represent the interests of justice shall not be  
31 subject to appeal.

32 [(b)] (c) The advocate may: (1) Monitor the case; (2) consult any  
33 individual with information that could aid the judge or fact finder and  
34 review records relating to the condition of the [cat or dog] companion  
35 animal and the defendant's actions, including, but not limited to,  
36 records from animal control officers, veterinarians and police officers;  
37 (3) attend hearings; and (4) present information or recommendations to  
38 the court pertinent to determinations that relate to the interests of  
39 justice, provided such information and recommendations shall be based  
40 solely upon the duties undertaken pursuant to this subsection.

41 [(c)] (d) The Department of Agriculture shall maintain a list of  
42 attorneys with knowledge of animal issues and the legal system and a  
43 list of law schools that have students, or anticipate having students, with  
44 an interest in animal issues and the legal system. Such attorneys and law  
45 students shall be eligible to serve on a voluntary basis as advocates  
46 under this section. The provisions of sections 3-14 to 3-21, inclusive, of  
47 the Connecticut Practice Book shall govern a law student's participation  
48 as an advocate under this section.

49 Sec. 3. Subsection (a) of section 53-247 of the general statutes is  
50 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October*  
51 *1, 2026*):

52 (a) Any person who overdrives, drives when overloaded, overworks,  
53 tortures, deprives of necessary sustenance, mutilates or cruelly beats or  
54 kills or unjustifiably injures any animal, or who, having impounded or  
55 confined any animal, fails to give such animal proper care or neglects to  
56 cage or restrain any such animal from doing injury to itself or to another  
57 animal or fails to supply any such animal with wholesome air, food and  
58 water, or unjustifiably administers any poisonous or noxious drug or  
59 substance to any domestic animal or unjustifiably exposes any such  
60 drug or substance, with intent that the same shall be taken by an animal,  
61 or causes it to be done, or, having charge or custody of any animal,  
62 inflicts cruelty upon it or fails to provide it with proper food, drink or  
63 protection from the weather or abandons it or carries it or causes it to be  
64 carried in a cruel manner, or fights with or baits, harasses or worries any  
65 animal for the purpose of making it perform for amusement, diversion  
66 or exhibition, shall [, for a first offense, be fined not more than one  
67 thousand dollars or imprisoned not more than one year or both, and for  
68 each subsequent offense, shall] be guilty of a class D felony.

69 Sec. 4. Section 53a-61 of the general statutes is repealed and the  
70 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2026*):

71 (a) A person is guilty of assault in the third degree when: (1) With  
72 intent to cause physical injury to another person or a domestic animal,  
73 he causes such injury to such person, [or] to a third person or to a  
74 domestic animal; or (2) he recklessly causes serious physical injury to  
75 another person or a domestic animal; or (3) with criminal negligence, he  
76 causes physical injury to another person or a domestic animal by means  
77 of a deadly weapon, a dangerous instrument or an electronic defense  
78 weapon.

79 (b) Assault in the third degree is a class A misdemeanor and any  
80 person found guilty under subdivision (3) of subsection (a) of this

81 section shall be sentenced to a term of imprisonment of one year which  
82 may not be suspended or reduced.

83 Sec. 5. Section 53a-61a of the general statutes is repealed and the  
84 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2026*):

85 (a) A person is guilty of assault of an elderly, blind, disabled or  
86 pregnant person, [or] a person with intellectual disability or a domestic  
87 animal in the third degree when such person commits assault in the  
88 third degree under section 53a-61, as amended by this act, and (1) the  
89 victim of such assault has attained at least sixty years of age, is blind or  
90 physically disabled, as defined in section 1-1f, or is pregnant, [or] (2) the  
91 victim of such assault is a person with intellectual disability, as defined  
92 in section 1-1g, and the actor is not a person with intellectual disability,  
93 or (3) the victim of such assault is a domestic animal.

94 (b) No person shall be found guilty of assault in the third degree and  
95 assault of an elderly, blind, disabled or pregnant person, [or] a person  
96 with intellectual disability or a domestic animal in the third degree upon  
97 the same incident of assault but such person may be charged and  
98 prosecuted for both such offenses upon the same information.

99 (c) In any prosecution for an offense under this section based on the  
100 victim being pregnant it shall be an affirmative defense that the actor, at  
101 the time such actor engaged in the conduct constituting the offense, did  
102 not know the victim was pregnant. In any prosecution for an offense  
103 under this section based on the victim being a person with intellectual  
104 disability, it shall be an affirmative defense that the actor, at the time  
105 such actor engaged in the conduct constituting the offense, did not  
106 know the victim was a person with intellectual disability.

107 (d) Assault of an elderly, blind, disabled or pregnant person, [or] a  
108 person with intellectual disability or a domestic animal in the third  
109 degree is a class A misdemeanor and any person found guilty under this  
110 section shall be sentenced to a term of imprisonment of one year which  
111 shall not be suspended or reduced.

112       Sec. 6. (*Effective October 1, 2026*) (a) There is established a task force to  
113 (1) study the establishment of a state animal abuse registry, (2)  
114 recommend revisions to the accelerated pretrial rehabilitation program  
115 established under section 54-56e of the general statutes concerning (A)  
116 restricting participation in such program by any person charged with,  
117 or that is a repeat offender of, an animal cruelty offense identified in  
118 section 53-247 of the general statutes, as amended by this act, and (B)  
119 ways to improve such program, and (3) recommend revisions to statutes  
120 concerning animal cruelty or neglect. Such study shall include, but need  
121 not be limited to, an examination of the following: (A) The information  
122 that should be collected for such registry and how often such  
123 information should be updated, (B) how such registry would be  
124 accessed by the public, (C) the content of the accelerated pretrial  
125 rehabilitation program and any recommendations for improvements to  
126 such program, and (D) laws in the state relating to animal cruelty or  
127 neglect.

128       (b) The task force shall consist of the following members:

129       (1) Two appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives;

130       (2) Two appointed by the president pro tempore of the Senate;

131       (3) One appointed by the majority leader of the House of  
132 Representatives;

133       (4) One appointed by the majority leader of the Senate;

134       (5) One appointed by the minority leader of the House of  
135 Representatives;

136       (6) One appointed by the minority leader of the Senate;

137       (7) Two appointed by the chairpersons of the joint standing  
138 committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters  
139 relating to insurance, who are mental health professionals who have  
140 experience in the provision of care to individuals who have experienced  
141 trauma;

142 (8) The Commissioner of Emergency Services and Public Protection,  
143 or the commissioner's designee;

144 (9) The Chief State's Attorney, or the Chief State's Attorney's  
145 designee;

146 (10) The Chief Public Defender, or the Chief Public Defender's  
147 designee; and

148 (11) The Chief Court Administrator, or the Chief Court  
149 Administrator's designee.

150 (c) Any member of the task force appointed under subdivision (1),  
151 (2), (3), (4), (5) or (6) of subsection (b) of this section may be a member  
152 of the General Assembly.

153 (d) All initial appointments to the task force shall be made not later  
154 than thirty days after the effective date of this section. Any vacancy shall  
155 be filled by the appointing authority.

156 (e) The speaker of the House of Representatives and the president pro  
157 tempore of the Senate shall select the chairpersons of the task force from  
158 among the members of the task force. Such chairpersons shall schedule  
159 the first meeting of the task force, which shall be held not later than sixty  
160 days after the effective date of this section.

161 (f) The administrative staff of the joint standing committee of the  
162 General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to insurance  
163 shall serve as administrative staff of the task force.

164 (g) Not later than January 1, 2027, the task force shall submit a report  
165 on its findings and recommendations to the joint standing committees  
166 of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to  
167 insurance and the judiciary, in accordance with the provisions of section  
168 11-4a of the general statutes. The task force shall terminate on the date  
169 that it submits such report or January 1, 2027, whichever is later.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 2	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	54-86n
Sec. 3	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	53-247(a)
Sec. 4	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	53a-61
Sec. 5	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	53a-61a
Sec. 6	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	New section

**Statement of Legislative Commissioners:**

The title was changed.

**INS**

*Joint Favorable Subst. C/R*

**JUD**