

Hello,

Thank you for your message and the opportunity to respond. Animal cruelty is a serious issue that must be prosecuted.

This specific case was charged by the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office as Animal Cruelty in the First Degree – the most serious animal cruelty crime in Washington State.

When the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office charged the case on Sept. 29, we asked a judge to issue a warrant and to hold the defendant on \$50,000 bail. King County prosecutors also asked a judge to order the defendant to have no access to *any* animal.

From the charging documents:

"Should the Court [a judge] allow the defendant to be released on his personal recognizance during the pendency of the proceedings, the defendant may commit a future violent act either against another animal or a person. Given the egregious response by the defendant in this case, bail is warranted to affirm community safety."

At his Oct. 13 arraignment, where the defendant pleaded not guilty, his defense asked the judge to make a motion to quash the warrant and grant him electronic home detention. Defendants are innocent until proven guilty in court.

The defense motions to quash the warrant and to move the defendant to electronic home monitoring were approved by the arraignment judge. That decision is separate from prosecutors.

While prosecutors cannot re-argue bail under court rules, King County prosecutors believe in our case, which is ongoing.

Animal cruelty cases are heartbreaking – and the penalties for that crime in Washington State often do not match the emotional impact of the abuse.

Washington State lawmakers do not define animal cruelty – even in the first degree – as a violent crime, and it is classified by lawmakers as a Class C felony, the lowest type of felony crime.

Sentencing ranges across Washington State are influenced by a defendant's offender score, which can range from 0 to 9+. In this specific case, the defendant has a 0 offender score. That 0 offender score corresponds with a statewide sentencing range – set by state lawmakers – of 1 to 3 months.

That means that even if prosecutors get a conviction as charged for the most serious type of animal cruelty charge, the sentencing range set by state lawmakers is 1-3 months. And under court rules, defendants get credit for pre-trial time spent on electronic home detention.

Even if prosecutors get conviction for first-degree animal cruelty as charged, it's possible there cannot be additional time in jail available under the current Washington State sentencing guidelines, set by lawmakers.

State lawmakers are the ones who can make changes to the law.

We have seen lawmakers take on this issue in past years. Before 2024, animal cruelty in Washington State was an unranked felony as set by the state's [Sentencing Guidelines Commission](#). That meant that

someone convicted of animal cruelty with no conviction history could face a sentencing range set by state lawmakers of 0-364 days – even for the most serious felony offense.

However, in the 2024 regular session, a bi-partisan effort ([HB 1961](#)) made first-degree cruelty a ranked offense. That's an improvement, but the sentencing range can still be low (because lawmakers currently rank first-degree animal cruelty as what they call a Level III offense, with Level I being the most severe). The law change allowed for some defendants to get higher sentences – ranging from months to 5 years.

But when a defendant does not have a previous offender score of felony conviction history, as we see in this case, the range set by state lawmakers is still 1-3 months of convicted as charged for first-degree animal cruelty. Under the law, prosecutors do not have the ability to ask for additional time in custody.

We appreciate you taking the time to email us. Animal cruelty is unacceptable and must be prosecuted.

Animal cruelty cases like this one will continue to be a priority for the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, and we will continue to work closely with police investigators. If prosecutors receive additional information that we can bring to the attention of the court, we certainly will do so.

Sincerely,

The King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office