The Current State of the U.S. Animal Law Movement

Animal rights lawyers have joined the larger animal rights movement to lay the groundwork to test new legal theories for granting additional legal protections for animals, including animals used in research. Many of the animal rights lawyers leading this movement advocate enactment of new federal and state laws, and establishment of new court precedents that might significantly interfere with animal research.

Evidence this movement is growing can be found in the following:

- The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) boasts the largest animal protection litigation program in the country. The program staffs thirteen full-time lawyers with offices in New York, San Francisco, Seattle and Washington, D.C. and claims to have a network of over 1,000 pro bono attorneys. The program also has over 80 active cases involving animal fighting, animal cruelty, puppy mills, animal farming, hunting and the Freedom of Information Act.

- The Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) boasts about its “groundbreaking efforts to push the U.S. legal system to end the suffering of abused animals.” It claims these efforts “are supported by hundreds of dedicated attorneys and more than 100,000 members.”

- At least 108 U.S. law schools offer or have offered specific courses on animal law.

- The Bob Barker Endowment Fund for the Study of Animal Rights Law has donated $1 million dollars to eight law schools for the purpose of creating a new animal law courses. Donations were made to law schools including: Duke, Stanford, Columbia, Harvard, UCLA, Northwestern, Georgetown, and the University of Virginia. (Harvard was the first recipient and only received $500,000.) Drury University has also been given $2 million for an undergraduate animal ethics course and an endowed professorship.

- In the last nine years, the number of law schools with Student Animal Legal Defense Fund (SALDF) groups has grown from 12 to 137.

- The American Bar Association formally established an animal law committee within its Torts, Trial and Insurance Practice Section (TIPS) and recently published its first annual newsletter.

- Seventeen state bar associations and the District of Columbia have animal law sections or committees (Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and the District of Columbia).

- Sixteen cities, two counties, and one state have passed laws replacing the term animal “owner” with animal “guardian.”

- Forty-three states and Washington, D.C. permit the creation of enforceable trusts for animals.

- Sixteen states now restrict the use of animals in a classroom setting, or require that dissection choice policies are in place: California, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Virginia.

- There are currently 5 law journals focused on animal law at law schools including: Stanford, Lewis and Clark, the University of Michigan, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Louisville.