



Agency of Human Services
State of Vermont
Department of Corrections

To: Corrections Oversight Committee

From: Andrew Pallito, Commissioner, Department of Corrections

Subject: Report on ACT 201 Section 3: COMMISSIONER OF CORRECTIONS, CARE OF ANIMALS

Act 201 instructs the Commissioner of Corrections to examine the feasibility of beginning an animal training or adoption program in Vermont and, specifically, a program that would permit qualified offenders to care for animals that have been relinquished or seized pursuant to a cruelty or neglect investigation. The Commissioner shall consider similar programs in other states and consult with local humane organizations in determining what type of program would be appropriate for Vermont and which facilities would be most appropriate to sponsor such a program. The Commissioner shall report his or her recommendations to the Joint Committee on Corrections Oversight on or before November 1, 2014.

The Department is currently working with the Blue Star Mothers of Vermont to address the needs of returning Veterans. This program matches a dog with an offender for a 12 month program that trains the animal to assist a veteran with special needs. Two dogs will be placed in the Springfield facility over the winter. Prior to placement in the facility, an animal spends 6-8 months with a community volunteer to receive basic behavior training. Once that period ends, the animal is placed with an offender who has been screened and trained to provide the specialized training. Dog trainers provide the offender with initial training and provide on-going training once the dog is placed inside the facility. Blue Star Mothers of Vermont has already identified an additional three dogs for placement.

Additionally, the CCA run facility in Beattyville, KY has a canine program that takes animals designated as hard to adopt from a local shelter. These animals live with an offender in their cell in the designated "Dog Unit" at the facility. The animal spends 12 weeks with the offender handler and then returns to shelter to be adopted out. This program also requires significant training of offenders and a special screening process to hire the offender for this job. We are examining the operation of this program to assess if it can be replicated in a Vermont facility.

At this point, the Department plans to move forward with the program that trains dogs for Veterans. The program will be monitored to understand all the issues related to the introduction of dogs at facility. At this time we do not recommend establishing a program in the Department to care for animals that have been seized or relinquished pursuant to a cruelty or neglect investigation.