

Nevada law keeps animal cruelty cases secret from public

By Frank X. Mullen Jr., Reno Gazette-Journal

“Cooney’s Law,” which went into effect a month ago and makes torturing or killing animals a serious crime, might have backfired by keeping those cases secret from the public.

“There was a late amendment to the law that was supposed to keep the identity of the reporting party confidential, to protect the person who comes forward to report abuse,” said Gina Greisen of Nevada Voters for Animals, who lobbied for the law.

“A blanket prohibition on talking about a case was not what was intended ... If this law was in effect last year, Cooney’s case would never have come to light.”

The law is named for Cooney, a mixed-breed dog who died after her owner sliced open her belly with a box cutter at a Reno motel. Police initially let Cooney’s owner go free because such animal abuse was then a misdemeanor offense, so advocates this year lobbied the Legislature to make severe abuse a felony crime.

As the deadline for bills neared this year, an amendment was added to the measure that makes such cases confidential and provides penalties for officials who discuss the cases or release reports.

“Not being able to talk about these cases makes it difficult for us as animal welfare advocates,” Greisen said. “The whole point was to protect the reporting party, not the alleged offender.”

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