

CFHS E-news bulletin

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Smoke-n-mirrors animal cruelty bill poised to pass in Parliament

Please help us Stop Bill S-203!

Call, fax or email your Member of Parliament NOW and ask him or her NOT to support Bill S-203 when it comes up for Third Reading vote in April. This is especially important if you are in a Liberal riding because if we can sway the Liberal vote then we can win this battle. S-203 is strongly opposed by the NDP. The Bloc is very supportive of Bill C-373 (a genuine animal cruelty bill, tabled as a private member's bill by Liberal MP Mark Holland), but are currently also supporting S-203. The Conservative Party supports S-203.

Keep the message simple: Don't support Bill S-203. It is a sham and will NOT increase protection for animals from cruelty and abuse. Our current law is archaic and ineffective and Bill S-203 will not change that. In national polls, petitions and campaigns, Canadians have demanded our politicians enact animal cruelty legislation that works and will move us beyond 1892.

Canada is far behind other developed and even less-developed countries in protecting animals from cruelty. We must stop Bill S-203 so that we can get the right amendments enacted. If the MP indicates he/she will support S-203 or has not yet decided, ask the MP to provide reasons why he/she thinks S-203 should be supported given the absolute opposition to the bill by all major animal protection organizations in Canada and, in fact, more than 85% of Canadians.

To get the name and contact information for your MP, go to www.parl.gc.ca. For more information on this issue, please visit our website: www.cfhs.ca.

Here's a little background information:

What's the problem?

Bill S-203 is a private member's bill from the Senate that will increase the sentencing provisions for animal cruelty crimes but will do NOTHING to close the loopholes in the legislation that allow many animal abusers to escape conviction. It is simply 1892 legislation adjusted for inflation. For example, the recent case of 29 horses found starved to death in Alberta, along with another 100 horses seized from the same property suffering from severe malnutrition, will not be prosecuted under the Criminal Code because the chance of conviction is slim.

Crimes of animal neglect are next to impossible to prosecute under today's law and Bill S-203 will NOT change this. Dog fighting cases are very difficult to prosecute and S-203 will NOT change this either. Animal crimes are considered property offences and wild and stray animals have less protection than owned animals. S-203 will change none of this. Today, less than 1% of animal abuse investigations are prosecuted.

Many Liberal and Conservative politicians support S-203, saying it's better than nothing and that another bill can be brought forward later to fix the rest of the problems. This is flawed logic and an abdication of responsibility on the part of the MPs elected to serve Canadians, not special interests. Passing S-203 will make it much harder to bring good legislation forward because Parliament will think they've addressed animal cruelty. If Bill S-203 dies, that would pave the way for good legislation, like Bill C-373, to move forward.

Who opposes Bill S-203?

Every animal protection group in Canada, including humane societies and SPCAs, opposes Bill S-203. It is also opposed by the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, as well as the vast majority of Canadians. More than 130,000 Canadians have signed petitions specifically opposing the bill – this is a very large petition that has been first misrepresented by a Liberal MP in the House of Commons and then ignored by Parliament.

What about protection for animal use industries?

Bill S-203 is supported by virtually all animal use industries, including hunters, anglers, farmers, trappers and researchers. Although most of these groups strongly supported Bill C-373's predecessor, they have now convinced politicians that such a bill could threaten their activities. That's why they are so keen on S-203. However, their position is based entirely on misinformation. Bill C-373 would have NO impact on lawful activities. They would be considered a 'lawful excuse' just as they have been for the past 115 years.

How did S-203 get this far?

Senator John Bryden initially tabled his bill (then called S-24) in 2005 in response to the paranoia and misinformation from the hunting and angling lobby groups. The power of these and other special interest groups has manipulated politicians into thinking that just increasing penalties for animal cruelty is enough. These strong lobby groups have convinced politicians to push reason aside and support a bill that entrenches 19th century concepts.

Where does S-203 stand now?

Bill S-203 was passed by the Senate last year. It was debated at length by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in February – the CFHS testified in early February – and was passed by the Committee on February 14th. It began Third Reading debate on March 10th and will continue debate and be voted on in early-mid April. This bill is very close to being enacted, so we need your support NOW.

Thanks for your support – the animals need you!!

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