June 24, 2019

For Immediate Release

Contact: Steve Walker (619) 531-3890
Tanya Sierra (619) 531-3315
En Español Barbara Medina (619) 531-3305

DA Reports Increase in Animal Cruelty Cases Linked to Domestic Violence

*Humane Society Joins with DA to Prevent Cruelty, Encourage Reporting*

In March of this year, an abandoned dog named Remington was found in Escondido weighing less than 20 pounds. He was extremely dehydrated and had sores on his hips and knees. Because of his critical condition, a felony animal cruelty investigation is underway by San Diego Humane Society’s Humane Law Enforcement. Should there be an arrest, the District Attorney’s Animal Cruelty Prosecution Unit will handle the case. Remington has since recovered and he was just one of the cases being highlighted as officials shine a light on animal abuse and its connection to other crimes.

Flanked by Remington and another dog that recovered from severe abuse, District Attorney Summer Stephan and San Diego Humane Society President Gary Weitzman urged the public on Monday to report cases of suspected animal cruelty to law enforcement. The news conference also highlighted the first anniversary of the DA’s Animal Cruelty Prosecution Unit.

From one year to the next, the number of animal cruelty cases with a domestic violence nexus nearly tripled according to figures from the District Attorney’s Office. Since the DA’s Animal Cruelty Unit was established, it has prosecuted 53 cases of animal abuse, of which 17 had a nexus to family violence. The previous year six of the 55 prosecuted cases also involved domestic violence, child abuse or elder abuse.

“When animals at home are abused or neglected, it is a warning sign that others in the household may be in danger,” DA Summer Stephan said. “Animals can’t speak for themselves, that’s why we need the community to look out and speak up.”
To report animal abuse, call 619-299-7012.
To report domestic violence, call 1-800-DV-LINKS

Animal cruelty is one of the earliest and most dramatic indicators that an individual may be developing a pattern of seeking power and control through abusing others. Specialty units, such as the Animal Cruelty Unit, provide countywide, prosecutorial and investigative support along with dedicated expertise.

The Humane Society’s tagline is “Look out, speak up.”

“Animals don’t have voices but they tell us everything we need to know,” Weitzman said. “We depend on the community to let us know if they are in harm’s way.”

The link between violence to people and violence to animals is well-documented by research, both nationally and internationally. Violence to animals is a predictor that the abuser may become violent to people. Studies show that animal abuse is more prevalent in homes that experience child abuse and domestic violence, and 43 percent of school shooters have animal abuse in their background. Often, animal abuse crimes also have a nexus to mental illness.

With approximately 68 percent of American households having a pet (82.5 million pets), the potential for a connection between animal abuse and human violence is prevalent. Cherished pets are more likely to be used as tools of manipulation by an abuser. They may get caught in the crossfire of violence toward people or the batterer may target the pet in order to gain silence and compliance from human victims. Families and communities are at risk when animal abuse is ignored or unreported alongside family violence. The DA’s Animal Cruelty Unit works with the Human Society the Department of Animal Services and law enforcement to investigate and prosecute animal cruelty cases.

# # #

About the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office

The San Diego County DA’s Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue fair and equal justice, and support victims daily across San Diego County.