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Caroline Lucas MP
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Dear Caroline

Thank you for your email of 24 June on behalf of your constituents, about the proposed changes to sentencing under the Animal Welfare Act.

The Government committed to increasing maximum sentences for animal cruelty offences in September 2017, and this was widely and warmly welcomed. On 26 June this year, the Government introduced a Bill to enable tougher prison sentences for the worst cases of animal cruelty. The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill means that anyone found guilty of causing unnecessary suffering to an animal could face up to five years in prison, a significant increase from the current maximum sentence of six months. Courts will be able to take a firmer approach to cases such as dog fighting, abuse of puppies and kittens, or gross neglect of farm animals.

The new maximum penalty of five years is also in line with campaigns by key stakeholders such as Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, Dogs Trust and the RSPCA. This is a positive step forward in improving animal welfare and will act as a serious deterrent against cruelty and neglect. Northern Ireland has already set the maximum penalty for animal cruelty offences at five years' imprisonment, and the Scottish Government has announced an intention to do so. The Welsh Government have confirmed that the new maximum penalty should apply in Wales and the Bill is drafted on this basis.

This Bill complements Finn's Law, which came into force on 8 June, and provides increased protection for service animals such as police dogs and horses. Once this Bill is approved by Parliament, it means that someone who attacks a police dog or horse could face a sentence of five years in prison.

The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill will provide one of the toughest sanctions in Europe, strengthening the UK's position as a global leader on animal welfare. This builds on recent positive action we have taken aimed at improving animal welfare standards in this country including one of the world's toughest ivory bans, and a requirement for CCTV in all slaughterhouses. For companion animals, we have introduced new updated minimum welfare standards for pet selling, dog breeding, riding schools, animal boarding and exhibiting animals; as well as a ban on the commercial third party sale of puppies and kittens.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact me about this important issue.

With best wishes,



David Rutley MP

Approved by David and signed electronically to avoid delay.