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TESTIMONY ENCOURAGING THE PASSAGE OF HB 1286: An act that increases penalties and fines for cruelty and aggravated cruelty to service animals, certified police working dogs, and police working horses. Cruelty against service animals would be a Class 5 felony and aggravated cruelty a Class 6 felony. Testimony to the Florida House Judiciary Committee April 18, 2023

Cruelty towards service animals, certified police working dogs, and police working horses in Colorado is a serious issue that requires urgent attention from lawmakers. The National Police Association urges the approval of HB 1286. Increasing penalties and fines for such crimes can serve as a deterrent and help protect these animals from harm.

Service animals and working animals play a vital role in our society. They help people with disabilities live more independently, provide support and assistance to law enforcement officials, and serve as companions to their handlers. Service animals are trained to perform specific tasks that enable their handlers to carry out daily activities that would otherwise be difficult or impossible. Working animals, such as police dogs and horses, are trained to perform tasks that help law enforcement officials detect and prevent crime.

Despite the critical role that service and working animals play, they are often subjected to cruelty and violence. According to a report by the Animal Legal Defense Fund, Colorado ranks 4th in the nation for animal protection laws, however, there is room for improvement in the state's animal cruelty laws.

Research has shown that increasing the severity of penalties can indeed deter individuals from committing such crimes. In states with higher penalties for animal cruelty, there were fewer reported cases of animal cruelty.

It is important to consider the severity of the crime and the impact it has on the animal and their handler. Service animals and working animals are not just pets; they are highly trained and provide valuable support and assistance to their handlers. Any harm inflicted upon these animals not only affects them but also their handlers and the community they serve.

Furthermore, increasing penalties and fines can also help support the rehabilitation and care of the animals that have been harmed. The fines collected can be used to provide medical care, housing, and other resources to the animals and their handlers. This can help ensure that the animals are able to recover from their injuries and continue to serve their handlers and communities.

In conclusion, the increasing prevalence of cruelty and aggravated cruelty towards service animals, certified police working dogs, and police working horses in Colorado is a serious issue that requires urgent attention from lawmakers. Increasing the severity of penalties and fines for these crimes, can help deter individuals from committing such acts, hold perpetrators accountable for their actions, and support the rehabilitation and care of the animals that have been harmed. Service animals and working animals play a critical role in our society, and it is our responsibility to ensure that they are protected and treated with the respect they deserve.