

# New York enacts Good Samaritan law for veterinarians

New York Gov. George Pataki on Oct. 7 signed into law a measure that protects veterinarians from liability when they inform law enforcement about a patient they suspect of being abused or neglected.

Veterinarians who discover signs of abuse or neglect while treating a patient might be reluctant to report their suspicions because of concerns about violating client confidentiality.

Under the New York law, which took effect immediately, a veterinarian acting in good faith when disclosing information about possible abuse or neglect of a companion animal cannot be sued by the patient.

"Good faith" means that the veterinarian reasonably believes the disclosure is necessary to protect the welfare of the animal or the public.

"Veterinarians are often the first line of defense for a companion animal in trouble," said Stacy Wolf, director of New York State Government Affairs and Public Policy for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

"This law will help law enforcement to better protect abused and neglected pets in our communities," Wolf said.

According to Gregory Dennis, a lawyer and former president of the American Veterinary Medical Law Association, legal protections for Good Samaritans are simply codification of a principle in American law that encourages the reporting of suspected or actual criminal activity to law enforcement.

"The common law in a number of states has recognized that if a person does that in good faith, all they're doing is complying with their duty as a citizen, and they should not be held liable for it," Dennis explained. ❖