

Lawmakers pass bill that penalizes leaving pets outside in extreme weather



A dog being watched by walker Natalia Straley plays in the snow Feb. 26, 2015, at the Montrose dog beach in Chicago.

(Anthony Souffle, Chicago Tribune)

By Jessie Hellmann Chicago Tribune

Illinois lawmakers to pet owners: Don't leave Fido outside in the heat, cold

Leaving the family pet outside in extremely hot or cold weather could result in up to a year in jail and a hefty fine under a measure House lawmakers sent Gov. Bruce Rauner on Tuesday.

The bill would make it a Class A misdemeanor to expose dogs and cats to life-threatening situations for prolonged periods of time in extreme heat or cold. That level

of offense is punishable by up to a year in jail and a fine of up to \$2,500, though judges would have discretion to impose lesser sentences.

Sponsoring Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, D-Chicago, said the bill was inspired by recent cases of dogs freezing to death in subzero temperatures last winter.

"This happens a lot. ... I think we see it in the city of Chicago also," Feigenholtz said.

"Our alderman's office gets calls all the time, and perhaps this will give us an opportunity to address the problem."

Opponents said the bill goes too far in regulating what people do with their animals and could affect farmers in particular.

"I grew up on a farm. I'm a farm boy," said Rep. Randy Frese, R-Paloma. "We take the best care of our animals. ... I think we've got enough laws in the state anyway. We probably have enough good laws to enforce treating animals correctly."

The House approved the measure 104-11. It passed the Senate last month and needs Rauner's signature to become law.

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