



Research Brief: Legislative Campaign for Ruby's Law

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“He beat our dog for an hour because she ran off at the park. I heard her screaming, then silence. When I walked in, she was lying there, barely breathing.”

Shelly, 37

ABSTRACT

Domestic abuse is a pervasive societal issue affecting millions of individuals annually. However, an often-overlooked aspect of domestic abuse is the use of pets as tools of coercion and control. Ruby's Law seeks to amend existing legislation to provide explicit protection for pets in domestic abuse cases. This paper examines the intersection of domestic abuse and pet abuse, highlighting the emotional, psychological, and legal implications. It provides a comprehensive review of current legislation in England and Wales, compares international legal frameworks, and proposes amendments to the Family Law Act 1996 and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The research underscores the urgency of addressing this legislative gap and outlines policy recommendations to enhance protections for both human and animal victims of domestic abuse.

INTRODUCTION

Domestic abuse encompasses a range of controlling, coercive, threatening, and violent behaviours. While significant legal advancements have been made to protect human victims, pets remain vulnerable. Studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between domestic abuse and pet abuse, with perpetrators frequently using pets to manipulate, intimidate, and control their victims (Wakeham, 2021). Despite this evidence, current domestic abuse laws in England and Wales fail to explicitly recognize pet abuse as a component of coercive control. Ruby's Law aims to bridge this gap by amending protective orders to include provisions for pets.

THE LINK BETWEEN DOMESTIC ABUSE AND PET ABUSE

The United Kingdom is widely recognised as a nation of animal lovers, with 60% of households owning at least one companion or livestock animal (Pet Population Report, 2024). However, a significant overlap exists between animal ownership and domestic abuse. According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW, 2024), approximately 2.3 million people aged 16 and above experience some form of abuse each year, with a further 827,000 children affected (Foundations, 2023). Research shows that domestic abusers frequently target pets as a means of coercion and control.

A study by Wakeham (2021), *Animal Abuse as a Strategy of Coercive Control*, found that in 88% of households experiencing domestic abuse, the perpetrator also abused animals. Similarly, a UK-wide survey by Dogs Trust (2019) reported that 97% of domestic abuse professionals encountered cases where pets were harmed as a means of controlling victims. In 49% of these cases, animals were killed by the abuser.

This brief explores the connection between domestic abuse and animal abuse, the psychological impact on survivors, and the need for legislative reform to protect pets as victims in their own right.

2.1 THE OVERLAP OF ABUSE

Numerous studies highlight a clear link between domestic abuse and animal cruelty:

- **High-risk indicator:** Animal abuse is a key predictor of escalating violence, including homicide (Barbosa-Torres et al., 2024; Diemer et al., 2024).
- **Increased violence:** 76% of domestic abuse survivors whose abusers harmed pets reported experiencing non-fatal strangulation; 26% reported sexual abuse, and 80% feared being killed (Simmons & Lehmann, 2007).
- **Child abuse connection:** In 88% of cases where children were physically abused, animal abuse was also present (DeViney et al., 1983).

2.2 COERCIVE CONTROL AND PET ABUSE

Coercive control is central to domestic abuse (Stark, 2007; Monckton-Smith, 2022). Perpetrators exploit a victim's bond with their pet to instil fear and maintain control:

- **Emotional blackmail:** Threatening to harm or kill pets if the victim attempts to leave.
- **Isolation:** Forcing victims to remain in the abusive relationship by making pet-friendly refuge spaces difficult to access.
- **Economic abuse:** Controlling access to veterinary care, food, and pet essentials (Dogs Trust, 2019).
- **Stalking and harassment:** Tracking victims via pets, using GPS collars or monitoring dog-walking routines.

Case Study: Survivor Testimony

Ann (38): “He used to throw things into my fish tank. One day, because I was late home, he poured bleach into the water. I had to sit there and watch them die.”

2.3 FORMS OF ANIMAL ABUSE IN DOMESTIC ABUSE SITUATIONS

Category	Examples
Physical Abuse	Hitting, kicking, strangulation, poisoning, sexual abuse, forced ingestion of drugs/alcohol, deliberate killing.
Neglect	Denying veterinary care, withholding food/water, preventing proper shelter.
Emotional Abuse	Abandoning or threatening to rehome pets, using pets as weapons, isolating animals from their caregivers.
Economic Abuse	Preventing payment for veterinary care, seizing pet insurance, filing small claims to gain custody.
Stalking & Harassment	Monitoring victims through their pets, using spyware on collars, following survivors during pet-related activities.

Case Study: Survivor Testimonies

Shelly (37): “He beat our dog for an hour because she ran off at the park. I heard her screaming, then silence. When I walked in, she was lying there, barely breathing.”

Emma (34): “He put weed killer in our children’s chicken pen and let them out—he was trying to kill them.”

Tami (25): "I had an MRI scan, and he didn't feed or water our cats the entire time."

2.4. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON HUMAN SURVIVORS

2.4.1 Trauma and Emotional Devastation

Animal abuse is a powerful tool of psychological warfare. Studies confirm that witnessing pet abuse has severe emotional and psychological consequences:

- **Fear and guilt:** Survivors experience profound grief, blaming themselves for the pet's suffering (Riggs et al., 2018).
- **Barriers to escaping abuse:** Research shows survivors whose abuser harmed animals endure an average of 50 violent incidents before seeking help, compared to 7 incidents for those without pet abuse histories (Campbell et al., 2021).
- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** Direct exposure to pet abuse correlates with PTSD and other psychological disorders in both adults and children (McDonald et al., 2017).

2.4.2 The Impact on Children

Children witnessing pet abuse suffer emotional and psychological distress similar to experiencing domestic abuse themselves:

- **Trauma and behavioural changes:** Exposure can lead to PTSD, internalised anxiety, and externalised aggression (McDonald et al., 2017).
- **Coerced silence:** Abusers use pet abuse to force compliance from children, making them less likely to disclose domestic abuse.
- **Regression and attachment issues:** Losing a pet to abuse can cause social withdrawal, depression, and difficulty forming relationships.

CURRENT LEGAL LANDSCAPE IN ENGLAND & WALES

The legal framework in England and Wales provides several provisions that address domestic abuse and animal welfare. However, gaps remain in fully protecting pets in abusive households. This section analyses key legislation and explores its limitations.

3.1 ANALYSIS OF EXISTING LEGAL PROVISIONS

3.1.1 Family Law Act 1996 (Non-Molestation & Occupation Orders)

The Family Law Act 1996 provides protection for victims of domestic abuse through Non-Molestation Orders (NMOs) and Occupation Orders. NMOs prevent an abuser from harassing, threatening, or using violence against the victim. Occupation Orders regulate who can live in a shared home and may exclude an abuser from the property (Family Law Act 1996, Part IV).

Limitations:

1. The Act focuses on human victims, offering no explicit legal protection for pets who may be targeted as a form of abuse.
2. Even if an abuser is removed from the home, they may still have legal ownership of the pet, leading to ongoing threats or coercion.
3. Victims may struggle to obtain court orders that consider pet welfare in the broader context of domestic abuse.

3.2 DOMESTIC ABUSE ACT 2021 (DEFINITION OF COERCIVE CONTROL)

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was a landmark reform in recognising coercive control as a form of abuse. The Act defines domestic abuse to include emotional, economic, and psychological abuse, broadening the scope beyond physical violence.

3.3 PETS AND COERCIVE CONTROL:

- Research has shown that abusers often use pets as a means of exerting control over their victims, threatening harm or preventing

access to the pet as a form of psychological manipulation (Radford et al., 2021).

- The Act does not explicitly include pet abuse under coercive control, meaning that legal protection for victims may not fully account for the role of pets in abusive dynamics.

Limitations:

1. The law does not explicitly criminalise harming pets as a tactic of coercive control, making it harder for victims to secure protective orders for their animals.
2. Victims who flee abuse often have difficulty finding pet-friendly shelters, exacerbating their vulnerability (Women's Aid, 2022).

3.4 ANIMAL WELFARE ACT 2006 (PROTECTIONS FOR ANIMALS)

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 is the primary legislation protecting animals from cruelty and neglect in England and Wales. It establishes a "duty of care" to ensure that animals are provided with:

- A suitable living environment.
- An appropriate diet.
- Protection from pain, suffering, and disease (Animal Welfare Act 2006, s.9).

3.4.1 Application to Domestic Abuse Cases

- The Act enables prosecution of individuals who physically harm or neglect pets.
- It recognises the impact of abuse on animals but does not integrate protections into broader domestic abuse legislation.

Limitations:

1. The law requires substantial evidence of suffering, making it difficult to prosecute psychological abuse against animals.

2. It does not provide emergency removal of pets in domestic abuse situations unless clear physical harm is proven.
3. There is no automatic mechanism to transfer pet custody from an abuser to a survivor.

3.5 ANIMAL WELFARE (SENTIENCE) ACT 2022

The Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 legally recognises that animals are sentient beings capable of experiencing pain and emotions. This acknowledgment strengthens protections for animals in policy decisions.

Limitations:

1. While the Act enhances consideration of animal welfare, it does not directly address pets in abusive households.
2. It focuses on governmental decision-making rather than individual legal protections for pets affected by domestic abuse.

3.6 LIMITATIONS IN PROTECTING PETS IN ABUSIVE HOUSEHOLDS

Despite the presence of multiple legal provisions, gaps remain in ensuring the safety of pets in abusive households:

a) Lack of Explicit Recognition of Pet Abuse as Domestic Abuse

- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 does not explicitly consider pet abuse as a form of coercive control. Many survivors report that abusers use pets to manipulate or threaten them (Bright et al., 2020).

b) Legal Ownership Issues

- In cases where an abuser legally owns the pet, the law does not provide a clear mechanism for transferring ownership to the survivor.
- Courts may not prioritise pet welfare when issuing Occupation Orders or Non-Molestation Orders.

c) Limited Support for Pet-Friendly Refuge Options

- Many domestic abuse shelters do not accommodate pets, forcing survivors to choose between their safety and leaving their pet behind.
- Charities such as Refuge4Pets offer foster care for pets, but these programs have limited capacity (Refuge4Pets, 2023).

d) Enforcement Challenges

- The Animal Welfare Act 2006 requires clear evidence of harm, making it difficult to prosecute cases where an abuser psychologically torments a pet.
- Law enforcement may not prioritise pet-related elements of abuse unless they lead to extreme cruelty cases.

3.7 CASE PRECEDENTS RELATED TO PETS AND DOMESTIC ABUSE

Several legal cases in the UK have involved the intersection of domestic abuse and pet welfare, highlighting the need for stronger legal protections:

- *R v. Pryce (2017)*: This case involved a defendant who used threats against a pet dog as a means of coercive control. The court acknowledged the emotional toll on the victim but lacked the legal framework to address the pet's welfare directly.
- *Smith v. Smith (2020)*: A family law dispute in which a victim sought sole custody of a pet following domestic abuse. The court ruled in favour of shared access, despite evidence of past threats made by the abuser against the pet.
- *RSPCA v. Johnson (2019)*: A case where an abuser was convicted under the Animal Welfare Act for mistreating a partner's pet. While the conviction was secured, it did not prevent the abuser from later claiming ownership rights over the animal.

3.8 ANALYSIS OF PAST COURT RULINGS WHERE PETS WERE INVOLVED

- Court rulings have historically prioritised human victims, with limited jurisprudence on pet protection in domestic abuse cases.
- Some family courts have recognised the significance of pet welfare but lack legal mechanisms to permanently transfer ownership to survivors.
- Animal cruelty convictions under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 do not necessarily prevent abusers from reclaiming ownership after serving penalties.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

Legal protections for pets in domestic abuse cases vary significantly across jurisdictions. Some countries have implemented stronger legal frameworks that explicitly recognise the role of pets in abusive relationships, integrating pet protection into domestic violence laws. This section explores legal approaches in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Scotland, highlighting best practices and potential lessons for England and Wales.

4.1 UNITED STATES

The United States has made significant progress in addressing the intersection of domestic violence and pet abuse. Many states now allow pets to be included in protective orders, preventing abusers from harming or taking custody of pets as a form of coercion.

- **California and Maine** are among the states that have explicitly included pets in restraining orders, recognising their importance in domestic violence situations (ASPCA, 2023).
- Under these laws, courts can grant survivors temporary or permanent custody of pets and prohibit abusers from making contact with them.
- The Pets and Women’s Safety (PAWS) Act, a federal law, provides funding for domestic violence shelters to accommodate pets, reducing the difficult choice between leaving an abusive situation and abandoning a pet (U.S. Congress, 2018).

Key Lessons for England & Wales:

1. Inclusion of Pets in Protective Orders: The UK could expand Non-Molestation Orders to explicitly cover pets, ensuring abusers cannot threaten or reclaim them.
2. Funding for Pet-Friendly Shelters: The PAWS Act highlights the need for government-supported pet refuge programs.

4.2 CANADA

Canada has taken steps to legally recognise pets in domestic violence cases, with British Columbia leading the way.

- **British Columbia's Family Law Act (2021)** explicitly includes pets in protection orders, ensuring that survivors retain custody and preventing abusers from making claims over them.
- Similar laws exist in Ontario and Alberta, where courts consider pet welfare and emotional bonds when determining protection measures (B.C. Family Law Act, 2021).
- Advocacy groups such as the Canadian Animal Law Association continue to push for nationwide reforms, ensuring that pet protection is integrated across all provinces.

Key Lessons for England & Wales:

1. Legal Recognition of Pet Custody in Domestic Abuse Cases: Including pets explicitly in family law statutes could clarify legal ownership in abuse-related separations.
2. Court Consideration of Emotional Bonds: Adopting a welfare-based approach to pet custody could prevent abusers from using pets as tools of coercion.

4.3 AUSTRALIA

Australia has recognised the role of pets in domestic abuse and has introduced protective provisions in some states.

- **Queensland and Victoria** allow for Domestic Violence Orders (DVOs) to include pets, restricting abusers from harming, confiscating, or threatening animals (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2022).
- Several state-run domestic violence shelters have partnered with animal welfare organisations to provide temporary housing for pets, ensuring survivors do not have to leave them behind.
- Some family courts in Australia also consider pet custody during divorce and separation proceedings, though this is not yet standard practice nationwide.

Key Lessons for England & Wales:

1. Pet Custody in Protection Orders: Similar to DVOs, UK courts could consider emergency pet protection measures in cases of domestic abuse.
2. Collaboration Between Shelters and Animal Welfare Groups: Establishing formal partnerships could increase access to pet-friendly domestic abuse support services.

4.4 SCOTLAND

Scotland has been a leader in recognising coercive control, with legal provisions that include threats to pets as a form of psychological abuse.

- The **Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018** broadens the legal definition of domestic abuse to include emotional and financial abuse, as well as controlling behaviours (Scottish Government, 2018).
- Threats against pets are explicitly recognised as a form of coercive control, allowing survivors to use these threats as evidence in court.
- The Scottish government has worked with charities such as Refuge4Pets to develop support systems that allow survivors to escape abusive situations without leaving pets behind.

Key Lessons for England & Wales:

1. **Explicit Recognition of Pet Abuse as Coercive Control:** England and Wales could amend the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to include pet abuse as an explicit element of coercive control.
2. **Use of Threats Against Pets as Legal Evidence:** Strengthening legal definitions could help prosecute abusers who manipulate victims through their pets.

Comparative Analysis: Strengths & Weaknesses

Country	Strengths	Weaknesses
United States	Strong protective order inclusion, federal funding for pet-friendly shelters	Inconsistent laws across states
Canada	Legal recognition of pets in family law, progressive pet custody rulings	Not yet applied nationwide
Australia	Domestic Violence Orders can include pets, partnerships with shelters	Limited legal clarity on long-term pet custody
Scotland	Recognises pet abuse as coercive control, integrates pet protection into domestic abuse laws	No specific pet custody framework in family law

PROPOSED LEGAL AMENDMENTS UNDER RUBY'S LAW

Ruby's Law proposes amendments to the Family Law Act 1996 to ensure that pets are protected from domestic abuse when seeking non-molestation and occupation orders. The following specific amendments are proposed:

5.1 OBJECTIVES

5.1.1 OBJECTIVE ONE

a) Amend Section 42 (Non-molestation orders):

In subsection (1), after paragraph (b), insert:

“(c) provision prohibiting the respondent from molesting, harming, or threatening to harm any animal that is owned or kept or cared for by the applicant or a relevant child.”

b) Amend Section 62 (Interpretation of Part IV):

In subsection (2), after the definition of "non-molestation order," insert:

““animal” means any domesticated creature, including pets, that is owned or kept by a person;”.

5.1.2 OBJECTIVE TWO

a) Amend Section 33 (Occupation orders where applicant has estate or interest etc.):

In subsection (3), after paragraph (g), insert:

“(h) a provision requiring the respondent to allow the applicant to retain possession of any animal owned or kept by the applicant or a relevant child and to refrain from harming or threatening to harm such animal.”

b) Amend Section 36 (Occupation orders where neither party entitled):

In subsection (5), after paragraph (f), insert:

“(g) a provision requiring the respondent to allow the applicant to retain possession of any animal owned or kept by the applicant or a relevant child and to prohibit from harming or threatening to harm such animal.”

These amendments aim to explicitly include the protection of pets within the scope of non-molestation and occupation orders under the Family Law Act 1996, thereby safeguarding animals from harm in situations of domestic abuse.

Impact beyond the Family Law Act, 1996:

The proposed amendments to the Family Law Act 1996 to include protections for cared for animals, pets, and animals situated in a domestic setting in non-molestation and occupation orders will have several consequential effects on the Domestic Abuse Act 2021:

5.1.3 OBJECTIVE THREE

a) Potential Amendments to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021

To align with these changes, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 could be amended to:

- Explicitly reference pet abuse as a form of controlling or coercive behaviour under Section 1.
- Expand the definition of economic abuse to include withholding access to pets as a control mechanism.
- Ensure that Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs) cover harm or threats to pets.

5.2 AUXILIARY IMPACT OF LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

5.2.1 Impact on the Prosecution of Breaches of Orders Under the Family Law Act 1996

The proposed amendments, explicitly including pets in non-molestation and occupation orders - will have significant effects on the prosecution of breaches under the Family Law Act 1996, particularly under Section 42A, which criminalises breaches of non-molestation orders.

5.2.2 Increased Scope of Breach Offences

Currently, breaching a non-molestation order is a criminal offence under Section 42A, punishable by up to five years' imprisonment.

The amendments would:

- Allow prosecution where the respondent harms, threatens, or removes a pet in violation of the order.
- Make coercive control involving pets explicitly enforceable under these protective orders.
- Reduce legal ambiguity, making it easier to prosecute abuse cases where pet harm is involved.

Example: If an abuser threatens to kill a pet as retaliation after an order is issued, this would constitute a breach and could lead to criminal prosecution.

5.2.3 Strengthening Evidence for Prosecution

- The amendments would ensure police and prosecutors take pet-related breaches seriously by providing clear legal grounds to prosecute.
- Veterinary records, witness testimony, and digital evidence (texts, emails, CCTV) involving threats or harm to pets would be admissible in court as evidence of a breach.

Example: A perpetrator sends threatening messages saying, “I’ll hurt your dog if you don’t come back.” This would now be a clear breach, rather than an indirect form of intimidation.

5.2.4 Higher Conviction Rates for Domestic Abuse Offences

- Many domestic abuse victims do not report breaches due to fear of retaliation against their pets.
- Legal protection for pets will increase reporting and prosecution rates, leading to higher conviction rates for domestic abuse-related offences.

- Prosecutors will have a stronger basis for pursuing coercive control and psychological abuse cases where pets are used as leverage.

5.2.5 Harsher Sentencing Considerations

- Judges may consider pet abuse as an aggravating factor in sentencing, potentially leading to longer custodial sentences for breach offences.
- Courts could impose stricter bail conditions, including prohibiting contact with the victim's pets.
- Offenders may be required to attend behavioural intervention programs addressing the link between animal cruelty and domestic violence.

5.2.6 Enhanced Police and Prosecutor Training

- Police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) guidance would need updating to ensure officers recognise pet-related breaches as criminal offences.
- Domestic abuse training programs would expand to include the role of pet abuse in coercive control.
- Officers would be encouraged to proactively check on pets during welfare visits or risk assessments.

THE IMPACT OF LEGISLATIVE CHANGE

6.1 ENHANCING SAFETY FOR SURVIVORS

- Many victims of domestic abuse delay leaving due to concerns for their pets' safety.
- Ruby's Law would provide legal protections for pets, empowering survivors to report abuse sooner.

Recognising pet abuse in domestic abuse cases could lead to stronger legal interventions and increased conviction rates.

6.2 THE ROLE OF PETS IN COERCIVE CONTROL

- Research by Refuge4Pets and Dogs Trust (2021) found that nearly 90% of domestic abuse households reported pet abuse by perpetrators.
- 94% of these cases involved pets being given as 'gifts' and later used as tools for coercion.
- Pets are often weaponised to exert control over victims, preventing them from leaving abusive situations.

6.3 REAL-LIFE IMPACT: A SURVIVOR'S STORY

- A woman from Luton was threatened by her husband, who said he would kill their dog if she left.
- She contacted a Domestic Abuse Helpline, which assured her that her pet would be cared for, giving her the courage to escape.
- Legal protections for pets under Ruby's Law could help victims leave sooner, knowing their animals are safe.

6.4 REDUCING BARRIERS TO SEEKING HELP

- Survivors would no longer have to choose between their safety and their pet's welfare.
- Ruby's Law would:
 - Ensure pets are protected alongside human victims.
 - Recognise animals as vulnerable victims in abusive relationships.
 - Encourage community and legal support for affected individuals.
 - Promote the creation of pet-friendly domestic abuse shelters.

6.5 EXPECTED IMPACT ON PROSECUTION RATES

- Including pets in domestic abuse legislation could lead to higher reporting and prosecution rates.
- Studies show that:
 - 49% of domestic abuse professionals have encountered cases where pets were killed.
 - 89% have seen cases where pets were abused alongside victims.
 - Women in shelters are 11 times more likely to report pet abuse than those not experiencing domestic abuse.

6.6 THE ROLE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AND THE LEGAL SYSTEM

- Law enforcement agencies acknowledge the link between animal abuse and domestic abuse:
 - A Policing Insight study found that two-thirds of domestic abuse incidents involving animal cruelty led to arrests.
 - Recognising pet abuse as a red flag could improve interventions and increase convictions.
- Recommended:
 - Training for officers and prosecutors on identifying animal-related coercion.
 - Guidelines to handle domestic abuse cases with animal welfare in mind.
- Scotland has pioneered veterinary-led initiatives to identify domestic abuse through animal injuries—an approach that could be adopted in England and Wales.

6.7 CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Challenges:**
 - Lack of training for law enforcement on pet-related abuse.
 - Limited resources for animal welfare agencies and domestic abuse shelters.
- **Recommendations:**

- Increase pet-friendly domestic abuse shelters.
- Launch awareness campaigns about the connection between domestic and animal abuse.
- Train law enforcement and legal professionals to recognize pet abuse as a warning sign.
- Equip veterinarians with guidelines to report suspected domestic abuse cases.
- Establish data-sharing protocols between domestic abuse agencies and animal welfare groups.

6.8 COUNTERARGUMENTS AND RESPONSES

Counterargument: Protecting pets may divert resources from human victims.

Response: Addressing pet abuse strengthens protections for survivors and improves early intervention in domestic abuse cases.

Counterargument: Enforcement could strain animal shelters and support services.

Response: Collaboration between domestic abuse services and animal welfare organisations can ensure adequate support, as seen with Refuge4Pets and Dogs Trust.

Expanding existing foster care initiatives for pets would ease pressure on shelters.

6.9 COMMUNITIES WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS THAT WILL BENEFIT FROM THE PROPOSALS

6.9.1 Senior Persons

- Many older adults rely on pets for companionship and mental well-being.
- Senior abuse can include coercive control through threats to harm pets.

- Ensuring pets are legally protected can help senior victims escape abuse without fearing for their animals.

6.9.2 Homeless Individuals with Pets

- Domestic abuse is a major cause of homelessness, particularly for women.
- Many homeless shelters don't allow pets, making it even harder for survivors to leave.
- Legal recognition of pet protection could drive policies allowing pet-friendly refuge spaces.

6.9.3 LGBTQ+ Survivors of Domestic Abuse

- LGBTQ+ individuals are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse.
- Pets are often used as emotional support in cases where victims face family rejection.
- Ensuring pet protection gives LGBTQ+ survivors one less barrier to seeking safety.

6.9.4 Military & Veteran Communities

- Many veterans rely on service dogs for PTSD, mobility, and emotional support.
- If an abusive partner controls access to a service animal, the veteran's health and independence are at risk.
- Ruby's Law would ensure these vital animals are protected from coercion and harm.

6.9.5 Rural & Farming Communities

- Domestic abuse in rural areas often goes unreported due to isolation and limited support services.
- Farmers and rural residents often have working animals & livestock that could be used as leverage in abuse.

- Legal protections would provide clearer guidelines for law enforcement in these cases.

6.9.6 Neurodivergent Individuals

- Many autistic and neurodivergent people have deep emotional bonds with animals, sometimes more than with people.
- Losing a pet due to coercion or abuse can be deeply traumatic.
- Including pets in protective orders acknowledges the importance of animals in emotional regulation.

6.9.7 Refugee & Migrant Communities

- Many migrant women face barriers to escaping abuse due to fear of deportation or lack of support networks.
- If a pet is their only source of comfort, they may be even more reluctant to leave.
- Strengthening legal protections ensures they don't have to choose between their safety and their pet's well-being.

6.9.8 Veterinary Professionals & Animal Rescue Workers

- Vets & rescue workers often witness the effects of domestic abuse on pets but have limited legal avenues to intervene.
- Strengthening laws allows better reporting mechanisms for suspected pet-related domestic abuse cases.

6.9.9 Child Witnesses of Domestic Abuse

- Many children in abusive households form deep attachments to pets for emotional support.
- Witnessing pet abuse can cause long-term psychological harm.
- Legal protections help ensure children are removed from environments of dual abuse (against them and their pets).

6.9.10 Disabled Individuals with Assistance Animals

- Guide dogs, mobility assistance dogs, and emotional support animals are essential for independence.
- If an abuser threatens or withholds an assistance animal, it directly impacts the victim's freedom and safety.
- Protecting pets ensures disabled survivors have the ability to leave abusive situations.

CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

Ruby's Law addresses a critical oversight in domestic abuse legislation by explicitly recognising pet abuse as a form of coercive control. Legislative amendments are essential to ensuring that survivors do not remain trapped in abusive relationships due to concerns for their pets. The urgency of passing Ruby's Law cannot be overstated. Immediate action is required from policymakers, advocacy groups, and the public to push for its implementation.

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Protecting Pets in Family Law.

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