



City hopes to help protect animals

By [Fallan Patterson](#) Forum Publishing Group

Pembroke Pines resolution urges state to better protect pets

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Florida is one of 21 states without laws that protect pets in domestic violence situations, and Pembroke Pines is hoping to remedy that.

The City Commission unanimously passed a resolution supporting legislation that would include pets in domestic violence protection orders and direct domestic violence organizations to offer accommodations for pets at their shelters.

"All too often, when there is a domestic violence dispute, pets are used as a wedge issue," said Vice Mayor Jay Schwartz.

Schwartz was approached by local Realtor and pet-sitter Heidi Jones, who created a rescue organization 10 years ago. Jones was moved by a 14-year-old child who contacted her organization looking for a safe place for the family's dogs.

"I helped them, and they have since been relocated to another area. They're safe and the dogs are safe," Jones said. "Had there been something organized in place, the entire family could have gone."

According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 70 percent of domestic abuse victims said their abusers threatened, injured or killed their pets, and about 50 percent postponed fleeing out of fear of what might happen to their pet.

"Too often, they're used as pawns to control the other spouse and children," Jones said. "It doesn't take much for someone in that state to attack the animals."

Mary Riedel, CEO of Women In Distress of [Broward County](#), agreed.

"It is a significant barrier for someone in an abusive situation because they know the perpetrator will hurt or kill their pet," she said.

WID works with the Humane Society of [Broward County](#) to alleviate such situations.

"It's about the pets, but it's also about the families because they have a very special bond with their pets," Riedel said. "It's about keeping families safe."

The two organizations hope to expand services at the shelter to allow pets to accompany their families.

"We're looking to build onto their location to house animals with our own staff to help take care of them," said Kathy Tricomi, senior vice president of the Humane Society. "We're trying to facilitate a more long-term situation."

The organization in October said goodbye to Tweety, a 19-year-old black cat that became its mascot after being rescued from a domestic violence situation as a kitten.

"She brought a lot of light to domestic violence," Tricomi said.

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