



March 4, 2022

Greetings Colleagues—

We heard it expressed in many different ways when we were youngsters: “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Or, probably more directly on point for this letter to you, “It’s no use closing the barn door after the horse is gone.” As each of us absorbed that bit of wisdom in our youth, none of us were thinking that it would be so integral to our grown-up lives as jurists. The aftermath of bad decisions and the actions that follow those decisions is the world in which we judges find ourselves daily. Trying to figure out what happened and then what orders, if any, will prevent it from happening again, is only one of our full-time jobs.

Another of our full-time jobs as judges is to pay attention to the larger communities in which our courts function. We are constantly asking the question “how is my community addressing this particular issue and where can I fit in helping to support that work?”

Many of us have answered that question by engaging in coordinated community response (CCR) work with various groups, both inside and outside our courts. We participate with other system partners in community-based coalitions to identify barriers to effective prevention or intervention. We seek to reduce or eliminate barriers so that the court and related family-serving systems function better for all of us. These coalitions work in many arenas, including juvenile, family violence, and elder abuse. Your work in each of these areas can be improved by growing your attention to, and understanding of, their connections to animal neglect and abuse.

Given the overwhelming research connecting abuse of animals to abuse perpetrated on humans (please see the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges’ [NCJFCJ] webpage <https://www.ncjfcj.org/family-violence-and-domestic-relations/animal-cruelty-and-family-and-interpersonal-violence/>) it is incredibly important to include the link between animal and other forms of interpersonal harm in your work on and off the bench. For example, we know that threats to pets are frequently used in intimate partner violence as a means of controlling the victim. Does your state allow for protective orders to include pets? Do shelters in your community provide for a victim to bring their dog or cat? Are the people working in your system, from advocates to court staff to judges, trained to address these issues in their work? If these aren’t current practices, how would you bring about change?

As a respected authority in your community, you can help bring together other community leaders and members to understand, prevent, and address the link between animal abuse and interpersonal violence. At the NCJFCJ, we teach the axiom: “when judges call meetings, people show up.” Calling the meeting is the easy part! Knowing what to do when you have people around the table is an entirely different skill.

The good news is that the National LINK Coalition has developed a resource, *Toolkit for Starting a LINK Coalition in Your Community for Guidance* (<https://nationallinkcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/TOOLKIT.pdf>) for community leaders, including judges, to help with the skills and steps needed to form and sustain a coalition for addressing the pressing, but under acknowledged, issues relating to the link between animal abuse and interpersonal violence.

In this Toolkit, you will find help with so many important questions for effective systems work. The Toolkit includes suggestions for identifying partners, coalition building, defining and analyzing the problems, and action planning; these are set forth to encourage local solutions to meet local concerns, augmented by additional resources.

Each state's Canons of Judicial Ethics define permissible use of authority and activities to ensure judges bring the appropriate impartiality and prudence to their public service, both on and off the bench. You will want to consult your respective state rules. But generally speaking, activities and efforts to engage in coalition building and education on such matters as the link between animal abuse and interpersonal violence fit squarely within your authority to promote the proper administration of justice and the effective functioning of the court system in your community. If you are still unsure about your role, the NCJFCJ also has resources for judges to support and guide your work in your community. I'd suggest you start with *Can I or Can't I? Extra-judicial Activity and Judicial Leadership*. (https://www.ncjfcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/NCJFCJ_Judicial_Ethics_Final_February2020-Rev.pdf)

As always, please know that the NCJFCJ is here for you. Technical assistance comes in many forms. Do not hesitate to call on us! Dr. Martha-Elin Blomquist, project staff member, will be happy to work with you. She can be reached at mblomquist@ncjfcj.org.

Take care,



Judge Katherine Tennyson, Ret.