

A Predictable Path to Unspeakable Violence: Analyzing the Nexus of Animal Cruelty, Domestic Abuse, and Mental Instability in the Case of Devin Kelley

Introduction: The Sutherland Springs Massacre and the Profile of a Mass Murderer

On November 5, 2017, a quiet Sunday morning service at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, was irrevocably shattered. Devin Patrick Kelley, a 26-year-old former U.S. Air Force airman, arrived at the church clad in black tactical gear and a skull-faced mask, armed with a Ruger AR-556 semi-automatic rifle.¹ Over the course of approximately 11 minutes, he fired an estimated 450 rounds into and inside the church, yelling, "Everybody dies, motherfuckers!" as he methodically moved through the building.¹ The attack, captured on a church camera, was an act of unmitigated slaughter that resulted in the deaths of 26 people, including an unborn child, and wounded 22 others.¹ The victims ranged in age from 18 months to 77 years old.³ After being engaged and wounded by an armed civilian, Kelley fled the scene, later dying from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.¹

In the immediate aftermath, investigators sought a motive, quickly identifying the massacre not as an act of random terror but as the culmination of a domestic dispute. Kelley's primary target was his mother-in-law, a congregant who was not in attendance that day.¹ This report posits that the Sutherland Springs massacre, while shocking in its scale, was the foreseeable and preventable culmination of a long, documented, and knowable history of escalating violence and profound psychological distress. Devin Kelley was not an enigma who suddenly snapped; he was the product of a multi-year trajectory of violent behavior that was repeatedly identified and subsequently mishandled by military, legal, and mental health systems.

Central to this analysis is the assertion that Kelley's documented history of animal cruelty was not an ancillary footnote to his violent career but a critical, co-occurring

symptom of the same underlying pathology that manifested as severe domestic abuse, sexual violence, and ultimately, mass murder. His case provides a catastrophic illustration of systemic failure and the tragic consequences of not recognizing the profound diagnostic significance of "The Link"—the well-established connection between violence against animals and violence against humans. Through a forensic examination of his military record, criminal charges, and mental health crises, this report will construct a psychological autopsy, demonstrating that the path to Sutherland Springs was paved with numerous, unambiguous red flags that were ignored, leading to one of the deadliest mass shootings in American history.

Section I: The Genesis of a Violent Offender: Domestic Abuse and Military Career

Devin Kelley's descent into mass violence was preceded by a well-documented history of interpersonal aggression, particularly during and after his tenure in the United States Air Force. An examination of this period reveals not isolated incidents of poor judgment, but a sustained pattern of extreme domestic abuse, control, and a propensity for using firearms to intimidate—behaviors that established the foundation for his final, catastrophic act.

Kelley's Air Force Service and Early Signs of Instability

Kelley enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 2009, serving in logistics readiness at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico until his discharge in 2014.¹ Even before his military service, however, there were indications of significant behavioral issues. At New Braunfels High School, he amassed a lengthy disciplinary record that included seven suspensions for offenses such as insubordination, profanity, and falsifying records, suggesting a pre-existing conflict with authority and social norms.¹ This pattern of defiance and aggression would intensify dramatically within the structured environment of the military, escalating from insubordination to life-threatening violence directed at his own family.

The 2012 General Court-Martial: A Portrait of Extreme Domestic Violence

The most significant and damning evidence of Kelley's violent nature emerged from his 2012 general court-martial, the most serious level of military trial proceedings.⁷ The case detailed a campaign of brutal domestic violence against his first wife and his infant stepson.

The charges and subsequent conviction were for two counts of assault under Article 128 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), to which Kelley pleaded guilty.¹ The violence described in the court records was exceptionally severe. Kelley admitted to striking his stepson on the head and body with a force "likely to produce death or grievous bodily harm," which resulted in the child suffering a fractured skull and a severe hematoma.⁴ This was not a momentary loss of control but an act of aggravated assault against a defenseless toddler. His abuse of his wife was similarly vicious and sustained. His guilty plea covered multiple specifications of assault, including striking her, kicking her, and choking her with his hands.⁸ In a later interview, his ex-wife recounted a year of terror in which Kelley slapped, choked, kicked, and water-boarded her, and frequently held a gun to her head, threatening to kill her and her entire family.¹

Critically, the initial court-martial charges against Kelley were even more extensive. He originally faced seven counts of assault, which included two charges of pointing a loaded firearm at his wife and two counts of threatening her with an unloaded firearm.¹ As part of a plea agreement, prosecutors allowed Kelley to plead guilty to the physical assault charges in exchange for dropping the five other charges, including all those that explicitly involved the use of firearms for intimidation.¹ While the physical assault conviction was, by law, sufficient to prohibit him from purchasing firearms, the dismissal of the weapons charges represents a significant missed opportunity. It removed a specific, formal data point from his record that would have flagged him as an individual who not only engaged in domestic violence but who used firearms as a primary tool of coercion and terror within his intimate relationships. This demonstrates how the administrative efficiencies of plea bargaining can inadvertently obscure the full and specific nature of an offender's dangerousness, complicating future threat assessments.

As a result of his conviction, Kelley was sentenced to 12 months of confinement and, in 2014, was given a "bad conduct discharge".¹ This distinction is legally crucial. Federal

law treats a "dishonorable discharge" as equivalent to a felony conviction, which is an automatic prohibitor for firearm purchases.⁷ A "bad conduct discharge," however, is not an automatic prohibitor.⁷ This created a bureaucratic gray area where the onus of prohibition fell not on the type of discharge but on the nature of the underlying conviction—in this case, a crime of domestic violence. This added layer of complexity required a more diligent and nuanced execution of reporting procedures by military personnel, a process that, as will be detailed, failed completely.

A Continuing Pattern: Post-Military Violence and Harassment

Kelley's violent and controlling behavior did not end with his military discharge. In February 2014, sheriff's deputies were called to his home to investigate a domestic violence complaint involving his then-girlfriend, Danielle Shields, whom he married two months later. No arrests were made after individuals at the home claimed there was no problem.⁴ In January 2015, a protection order was granted against him in El Paso County, Colorado.¹ Furthermore, a sexual assault case was opened against him in Comal County in 2013, but the investigation became inactive after authorities believed he had moved out of state.¹¹

A comprehensive case study released by the U.S. Secret Service in 2025 further illuminates this period, documenting a pervasive pattern of sexual violence against multiple women and girls, ranging from sexual coercion to forcible rape.¹³ These acts, which often went unpunished, establish a clear and undeniable throughline of extreme misogyny and a pathological need to dominate and control women. This pattern of behavior is not separate from the violence that led to the Sutherland Springs massacre but is, in fact, its direct psychological antecedent.

Section II: A Declaration of War: Mental Health Crises and Institutional Negligence

Devin Kelley's history is not merely a chronicle of violent acts; it is also a stark record of a severe mental health crisis that was identified but ultimately uncontained. His brief institutionalization in 2012 was not for a passive disorder but was a direct

response to his being assessed as an active and imminent threat. The subsequent escape and the catastrophic, multi-layered failure of the U.S. Air Force to report his criminal history transformed a known danger into an unchecked killer, illustrating a complete breakdown of the systems designed to prevent such tragedies.

Commitment to Peak Behavioral Health Services

In 2012, while facing court-martial for the brutal assaults on his family, Kelley was admitted to Peak Behavioral Health Services, a mental health facility in Santa Teresa, New Mexico.¹ The context of this commitment is critical. It was not a voluntary admission for depression or anxiety but a measure taken after he was deemed a significant threat. An El Paso police report from the time explicitly warned that Kelley "was a danger to himself and others".¹⁵ This assessment was based on alarming, pre-attack behaviors that went far beyond the scope of his domestic abuse charges.

Kelley had been caught sneaking firearms onto Holloman Air Force Base, a secure military installation.¹ This act alone demonstrated a high level of premeditation and a disregard for military law. Compounding this, he was simultaneously "attempting to carry out death threats that (he) had made on his military chain of command".¹ While institutionalized, his threatening behavior continued; he was discovered using facility computers to order "weapons and tactical gear to a P.O. box in San Antonio" and expressed a desire for "some kind of retribution to his chain of command".¹ This reframes the "mental health issue" from one of an individual's internal struggle to a documented case of externalized, homicidal ideation requiring immediate and secure containment.

The Escape and Apprehension

On June 7 (or 13, reports vary), 2012, Kelley escaped from the facility. He jumped a fence and fled to a bus terminal in El Paso, Texas, with the clear intention of leaving the state.¹ He was apprehended by El Paso police without incident and turned over to authorities in New Mexico.¹⁵ The incident, however, underscores the severity of the threat he posed. His escape was not merely a patient wandering off; it was a potential killer, who had already demonstrated a willingness to smuggle weapons and make

death threats, breaking containment.

The DODIG Report: A Cascade of Failures

The institutional negligence that allowed Kelley to legally arm himself is meticulously detailed in the Department of Defense Inspector General's (DODIG) report, DODIG-2019-030, released in December 2018. The report presents a damning indictment of the U.S. Air Force's procedural and administrative competence.

The central finding of the investigation was unequivocal: the Air Force's failure to submit Kelley's disqualifying criminal history information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was the direct cause of his ability to legally purchase the firearms he used in the massacre.¹⁹ The system designed to prevent precisely this scenario existed and was robust in theory; it failed in practice due to a complete breakdown in basic administrative procedure.

This was not a single, isolated error. The DODIG identified four separate occasions on which Air Force personnel were required by policy to collect and submit Kelley's fingerprints to the FBI's criminal history database and failed to do so. They also missed two additional opportunities to submit the final disposition report of his court-martial conviction.¹⁹ This cascade of failures meant that Kelley's name and disqualifying conviction were never entered into the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). Consequently, between 2014 and 2017, Kelley was able to purchase four firearms from licensed dealers in both Colorado and Texas, passing the NICS background check each time because the database was fatally incomplete.³

This was not an unforeseeable problem. The Air Force itself later acknowledged that the failure to report Kelley's record was "not an isolated incident".²⁴ A 2015 Pentagon report had already identified widespread, systemic problems with the military's failure to provide crucial offender data to the FBI, finding that fingerprints were not submitted in about 30% of serious cases.²⁵ Specifically, the report found that the Air Force had failed to submit the fingerprints of at least 110 convicted airmen between 2010 and 2012, the very period during which Kelley was prosecuted.²⁵ Kelley's case was a tragic symptom of a known, unaddressed institutional disease. The Sutherland Springs massacre was not caused by a legal loophole that needed closing, but by the

persistent failure of a government agency to follow existing law and its own policies.

Section III: The Voiceless Victim: Animal Cruelty as a Definitive Red Flag

Amidst Devin Kelley's documented history of violence against humans, a crucial and highly predictive behavioral marker emerged: a charge of animal cruelty. The 2014 incident in Colorado, when viewed through the extensive academic and clinical research on "The Link" between animal and human violence, was not a minor transgression. It was a definitive red flag—a clear manifestation of the same pathological lack of empathy, need for control, and capacity for violence that defined his abuse of his wife and stepson. The legal system's failure to recognize its significance represents another profound missed opportunity for intervention.

The 2014 Colorado Animal Cruelty Case

On August 1, 2014, while residing in a mobile home park in El Paso County, Colorado, Kelley was cited for misdemeanor cruelty to animals.¹ The details of the incident, provided by multiple witnesses, paint a picture of deliberate, violent abuse. One witness reported seeing Kelley chase his husky, jump on top of it, and punch the dog four to five times near its head and neck. He then grabbed the dog by the neck and dragged it away.⁴ A second witness corroborated the violence, stating they saw Kelley pick the dog up into the air and throw it to the ground.⁴ When a sheriff's sergeant responded to the scene, he found the dog to be undernourished, indicating a pattern of neglect in addition to the acute violence.⁴

When confronted, Kelley denied hitting or throwing the dog. He claimed he had merely "jumped on the dog" to prevent it from acting aggressively toward another animal.⁴ This act of deceit and refusal to accept responsibility in the face of direct witness testimony is consistent with the manipulative and blame-shifting behaviors characteristic of individuals with antisocial personality traits. Despite the clear evidence of abuse, the legal outcome was minimal. Kelley was given a deferred probationary sentence and ordered to pay \$368 in restitution. After completing his

sentence, the charge was formally dismissed in March 2016, effectively erasing this critical piece of his violent history from his public record.³ This legal leniency demonstrates a systemic failure to appreciate the diagnostic gravity of animal cruelty, especially when perpetrated by an individual with a known history of aggravated assault.

Anecdotal Evidence of Deeper Cruelty

Beyond the officially documented case, anecdotal reports suggest Kelley's cruelty to animals was more extensive and deeply rooted. A former coworker reported that Kelley had bragged about two particularly disturbing acts: "snapping his pet dog's neck when he was just ten years old" and, more recently, buying dogs on Craigslist to use for "target practice".²⁷ While these claims are not officially substantiated in the provided materials, they align perfectly with his documented behavior and with established psychological patterns. The act of boasting about violence is a performative behavior designed to project an identity of remorseless power, instill fear, and normalize one's own violent ideations.²⁸ It is a form of self-mythologizing common among sociopathic individuals, suggesting a long-standing internal narrative in which cruelty is a source of pride and control.

Situating Animal Cruelty within "The Link"

The academic literature provided offers a robust framework for understanding the profound significance of Kelley's animal abuse. "The Link" is a term used by researchers and law enforcement to describe the well-documented correlation between cruelty to animals and violence toward humans.³⁰

- **A Predictive Crime:** A landmark study by the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Northeastern University found that individuals who abuse animals are five times more likely to commit violent crimes against humans.³⁰ The FBI considers animal cruelty a predictor of violence and a key factor when profiling violent offenders.³³
- **Co-occurrence with Domestic Violence:** Research consistently demonstrates a strong co-occurrence of animal abuse and intimate partner violence (IPV).³⁵

Between 54% and 71% of women in domestic violence shelters report that their partners had threatened, injured, or killed family pets.³³ Abusers exploit the human-animal bond as a tool of coercion, terror, and control, harming pets to punish and manipulate their human victims.³⁰ Kelley's history of extreme IPV and his documented animal cruelty fit this profile perfectly.

- **A Symptom of Conduct Disorder:** In adolescents, physical cruelty to animals is a key diagnostic criterion for Conduct Disorder, a psychiatric syndrome characterized by a persistent pattern of violating the rights of others and disregarding social norms.³⁸ This disorder is often a precursor to Antisocial Personality Disorder in adulthood.⁴² Kelley's behaviors align closely with this diagnostic trajectory.

The following table provides a chronological overview of Kelley's documented violent and criminal behavior. Its purpose is to visually demonstrate that his violence was not a linear progression from one type of victim to another, but rather a concurrent and multifaceted expression of a single, persistent pathology.

Date(s)	Event	Victim(s)	Outcome/Significance
2011–2012	Domestic Assault	First Wife & Stepson	Court-martial conviction; aggravated assault resulting in a child's fractured skull ¹
June 2012	Threats & Mental Health Crisis	Military Superiors	Commitment to/escape from mental health facility; deemed a danger to self and others ¹
June 2013	Sexual Assault Allegation	Unnamed	Case became inactive after Kelley was believed to have left the state ¹¹
February 2014	Domestic Violence Complaint	Then-Girlfriend	Deputies responded, but no arrest was made or report generated ⁴

August 2014	Animal Cruelty	Pet Husky	Misdemeanor charge; multiple witnesses observed Kelley punching and throwing the dog ³
January 2015	Protection Order	Unnamed	Order granted against Kelley in El Paso County, Colorado ¹
November 2017	Mass Shooting	Church Congregants	26 fatalities, 22 injuries ¹

As the table illustrates, the 2014 animal cruelty incident occurred *after* his court-martial for nearly killing his stepson and *during* a period marked by other allegations of domestic and sexual violence. This timeline refutes any simple narrative of a criminal "graduating" from animal to human victims. Instead, it reveals a consistent pattern of violence directed at any vulnerable target available, be it a spouse, a child, or an animal. The animal cruelty was not a starting point; it was just one more symptom of his generalized, low-empathy aggression.

Section IV: A Psychological Autopsy: Synthesizing the Pathway to Mass Violence

The totality of Devin Kelley's documented life provides the material for a comprehensive psychological autopsy. His actions were not the result of a sudden psychotic break from reality but rather the culmination of a deeply ingrained personality structure characterized by a lack of empathy, a profound need for power and control, a tendency toward violence as a problem-solving tool, and a simmering sense of grievance. His profile is not one of psychosis, but of psychopathy and extreme antisocial behavior, in which the Sutherland Springs massacre served as the final, catastrophic expression of a lifetime of violence.

Constructing the Profile: A Convergence of Pathologies

Kelley's behavior demonstrates a clear and persistent pattern of aggression and violation of others' rights, consistent with a severe personality disorder on the antisocial spectrum. His lengthy disciplinary record in high school points to early-onset behavioral problems, aligning with precursors for Conduct Disorder.¹ This psychiatric syndrome, which often emerges in childhood or adolescence, is defined by symptoms including aggression toward people or animals, destruction of property, and serious rule violations.³⁸ Kelley's documented actions—assaulting his family, abusing his pet, and his history of insubordination—map directly onto these diagnostic criteria.

As an adult, his life became a case study in the traits associated with Antisocial Personality Disorder: a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others, deceitfulness (as seen in his denial of the animal abuse), a profound lack of remorse, and an inability to conform to lawful behavior.⁴⁵ The U.S. Secret Service case study provides the most incisive lens through which to view his pathology, framing his actions as being fundamentally driven by extreme misogyny and a pathological need to dominate and control the women in his life.¹³ He used physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse as instruments of this control. The massacre itself was the ultimate act in this pattern, targeting a location of deep personal significance to his estranged wife and her mother, whom he had been harassing via threatening text messages.⁵

This grievance-fueled motivation is a common thread among mass attackers. His desire for "retribution to his chain of command" during his 2012 mental health crisis demonstrates that a sense of perceived injustice was a long-standing and powerful motivator for his violent ideations.¹ The domestic dispute with his mother-in-law was not an isolated conflict but the final trigger for a pre-existing and well-developed potential for mass violence.⁴⁸

Deconstructing "The Link" in Kelley's Case

Kelley's case offers a textbook example of the psychological mechanisms that constitute "The Link" between animal and human violence.

- **Desensitization and Rehearsal:** The act of repeatedly inflicting pain and suffering on a defenseless animal can serve to desensitize an individual to

violence, eroding the natural inhibitions against harming living creatures and making subsequent violence against humans psychologically easier.³⁴ The anecdotal report that Kelley used dogs for "target practice" is a chillingly literal example of violence rehearsal.²⁷

- **Expression of Dominance:** For individuals who feel powerless or disrespected in other areas of their lives—such as Kelley's failing military career—violence against a weaker, defenseless victim provides a powerful feeling of control and dominance.³⁴ His violence against his wife, his stepson, and his dog all served this same psychological function: the assertion of absolute power over a vulnerable being.
- **A Core Lack of Empathy:** Ultimately, the capacity to fracture a child's skull, choke a spouse, and beat a dog stems from the same core psychological deficit: a profound and pathological lack of empathy. This callous-unemotional trait is a hallmark of psychopathy and severe antisocial personality disorder, preventing the individual from recognizing or caring about the pain and suffering of their victims.³³

Comparative Analysis with Columbine: The Power of Co-occurrence

To fully appreciate the predictive power of animal cruelty in Kelley's case, it is useful to contrast it with the more ambiguous data from other mass shootings, such as the 1999 Columbine High School massacre. Numerous sources claim that perpetrators Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold "boasted of mutilating animals".⁵² However, this claim is often presented without primary source evidence, and a deeper analysis of the research reveals a more complex picture. Multiple studies, including a joint task force report by the U.S. Secret Service and the Department of Education, have found that most school shooters do

not have a documented history of animal abuse.⁴⁵

This comparison serves as a crucial cautionary note against adopting a simplistic, one-to-one formula where animal abuse is treated as an infallible predictor of future mass violence. Instead, it strengthens the central argument of this report: the diagnostic and predictive power of animal cruelty is amplified exponentially when it *co-occurs* with other documented patterns of interpersonal violence. In the case of Harris and Klebold, the evidence for animal cruelty is largely anecdotal and contested. In the case of Devin Kelley, the animal cruelty was officially documented and occurred

within the context of a court-martial conviction for nearly killing a child, multiple domestic violence complaints, and a sexual assault investigation. It was not an isolated indicator; it was a powerful *confirmatory indicator* of a generalized, remorseless, and multifaceted propensity for violence.

The Sutherland Springs shooting can, therefore, be understood as the ultimate act of domestic violence, writ large upon a community. The target, the motivation, and the underlying psychology were all inextricably rooted in Kelley's long and brutal history of intimate partner violence. The massacre was not a separate category of crime; it was a catastrophic expansion of the "private" war he had been waging against his family for years into the public sphere. This reframes the issue of mass shootings, suggesting that they are not only a gun control problem or a mental health problem, but often, at their core, a domestic violence problem.

Conclusion and Recommendations: Breaking the Cycle of Violence

The investigation into the life and crimes of Devin Kelley leads to an inescapable conclusion: the Sutherland Springs church massacre was a preventable tragedy. Kelley's path to mass murder was not hidden or mysterious; it was a well-documented, years-long trajectory of escalating violence that was repeatedly brought to the attention of the very institutions—military, law enforcement, and judicial—tasked with public safety. His case is a catastrophic study in the failure to connect the dots, particularly in recognizing the profound link between his extreme violence against intimate partners, children, and animals. This was compounded by a series of inexcusable administrative failures that armed a known, dangerous individual. Based on this comprehensive analysis, the following evidence-based recommendations are proposed to prevent similar tragedies.

Recommendations

- 1. For the Department of Defense: Mandate Automated and Audited Criminal Reporting.**
 - **Recommendation:** The Department of Defense must implement a fully

automated, non-discretionary system for reporting all court-martial convictions for violent crimes, particularly those qualifying as domestic violence, to the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) database.

- **Rationale:** The DODIG report on the Kelley case revealed that a manual, discretionary system is catastrophically prone to human error and non-compliance. The Air Force missed at least four distinct opportunities to submit Kelley's fingerprints and conviction data.¹⁹ Automation would remove the element of individual judgment or oversight and ensure that disqualifying records are transmitted in a timely and reliable manner. This system should be subject to regular, independent audits to verify compliance.

2. For Law Enforcement: Implement Mandatory, Cross-Disciplinary Training on "The Link."

- **Recommendation:** All state and local law enforcement agencies should implement mandatory, recurring training on the well-established link between animal cruelty, domestic violence, and child abuse.
- **Rationale:** Research shows a strong co-occurrence between these forms of violence.³¹ An officer responding to an animal cruelty complaint must be trained and procedurally required to investigate for potential domestic violence or child abuse in the household, and vice-versa. Protocols should be updated to require officers investigating animal cruelty to run a subject's record for prior domestic violence offenses, as this combination is a potent indicator of heightened risk. Kelley's 2014 animal cruelty charge was treated as an isolated misdemeanor, ignoring his recent court-martial for nearly killing a child.³

3. For the Judicial System: Enhance Sentencing and Intervention for Co-occurring Violence.

- **Recommendation:** State legislatures should enact statutes that treat animal cruelty charges with significantly greater severity when the defendant has a prior record of interpersonal violence. In such cases, deferred sentences and charge dismissals should be explicitly disallowed.
- **Rationale:** Kelley received a deferred sentence for violently beating his dog, and the charge was ultimately dismissed.³ This outcome demonstrates a failure to recognize the act as part of a dangerous continuum of behavior. A prior conviction for violent domestic assault should have served as an aggravating factor, triggering a more severe sentence and, critically, a mandatory and comprehensive psychological evaluation to assess the risk of future violence.

4. For Threat Assessment Professionals: Update Risk Assessment Models.

- **Recommendation:** Behavioral threat assessment models used by law enforcement, mental health professionals, and corporate security should be updated to assign a significantly higher risk value to individuals who exhibit a co-occurring history of both domestic violence and animal cruelty.
 - **Rationale:** While animal cruelty alone may not be a perfect predictor of mass violence, Kelley’s case demonstrates that its presence alongside a documented history of severe domestic abuse is a powerful sign of generalized, low-empathy aggression and a capacity for extreme violence. This combination should trigger the highest level of scrutiny and intervention.
5. **Legislative Action: Expand Support for Interconnected Victim Services.**
- **Recommendation:** Federal and state governments should continue to support and expand legislation modeled on the Pet and Women Safety (PAWS) Act.³¹ This includes funding for domestic violence shelters to accommodate pets and promoting cross-reporting protocols between animal welfare agencies and social services.
 - **Rationale:** Abusers frequently use pets as leverage to control and terrorize human victims.³⁰ By providing a safe harbor for the entire family unit, including companion animals, such legislation removes a significant barrier that often prevents victims from leaving abusive situations, thereby breaking the cycle of violence before it can escalate to the level seen in Sutherland Springs.

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