In recent years, there has been a monumental increase in wildlife crime, resulting in an extinction crisis that threatens the global diversity of species, as well as the security and stability of many countries. Wildlife trafficking is one of the leading causes of this crisis. Unfortunately, it is a multi-billion dollar global industry with a low rate of arrests and convictions.

Because of its underground nature, detection is almost impossible through law enforcement officials acting alone. Protecting and incentivizing people to report illegal activity is crucial to combating this increasingly lucrative trade and the poaching that sustains it – but additional enforcement capabilities are needed.

### What is animal cruelty?

Animal cruelty involves gratuitously inflicting harm, injuring, or killing an animal. The cruelty can be intentional, such as kicking, burning, stabbing, beating, or shooting; or it can involve neglect, such as depriving an animal of water, shelter, food, and necessary medical treatment. Animal fighting, in which animals are trained or forced to attack each other in violent confrontations at the risk of grave injury or death, is another form of animal cruelty.

### Should I report animal cruelty if I suspect it, but do not have proof?

Yes. Animal cruelty is against the law in every state, and certain acts of animal abuse are also considered felonies. It is important to report a suspected crime, whether it is animal abuse, child abuse, or some other illegal act. Do not worry if you cannot “prove your case.” The job of law enforcement is to investigate suspicious activities. Your report, even if it is not “complete,” is useful evidence that will help them determine the facts and the need for further action.

### Whom should I call to report animal cruelty?

Because animal cruelty is a crime, we recommend that you first report any suspected abuse to the local police or sheriff.  If you suspect an act of cruelty is presently occurring or will soon occur, and feel that emergency action is warranted to prevent serious injury or death to an animal, call 911. To report animal cruelty that has already occurred (and may occur again, but does not at present involve imminent danger to the animal), call your local police department at the main number.

In addition to law enforcement agencies, it also is recommended that you call the local animal services agency or humane society. Sometimes these agencies are associated with the police or sheriff’s department. But in emergency situations, please call 911 first.

### Can I make a report anonymously?

You may remain anonymous. However, a successful outcome is more likely to occur if you are willing to give your name and, if needed, testimony. Law enforcement often is understaffed and underfunded. A case is more likely to be pursued if the person reporting gives his/her name and indicates a willingness to help in other ways. If you do give your name to law enforcement, it should be kept strictly confidential.

### How can I respond to animal cruelty that I notice on a social media platform, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram?

For many reasons, such as the difficulty of knowing the origin of the material and the potential for the materials to be fabricated, this is a very difficult area to navigate. While it may seem counterintuitive, it is important NOT to report the offending material to the social media platform (e.g., Facebook). If a post is found to be contrary to the site’s guidelines, the post will be removed. Sometimes, the poster’s account will be deactivated as well. In either situation, this prevents law enforcement from having access to the offending post in question. The Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) and Jill Hollander, senior assistant district attorney for the Atlanta Judicial Circuit, published an excellent blog about actions you can take if you witness suspected animal cruelty on social media. The Animal Legal Defense Fund has granted us permission to reproduce that blog below:

*The Internet and social media are reflections of our society — the good, the bad, and the ugly. All too often the Animal Legal Defense Fund gets calls and emails from people who have stumbled across digital content that contains images depicting obvious acts of animal abuse asking us what they should do about the evidence they have discovered.*

*Before we get into the details of the answer, to avoid a common point of confusion, let’s ensure we are all clear about the content at issue here. As a general rule (subject to a handful of key exceptions related to obscenity), images depicting criminal conduct are not illegal to possess, share, or distribute—thank you First Amendment.*

*As outrageous as that may seem, remember that the cruel conduct depicted in those images is illegal and that is where we must focus the effort. The key obscenity-related exceptions noted above involve [child pornography](https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/2252A" \t "https://awionline.org/content/_blank), crush videos and other content that qualifies as criminally obscene, but those are topics for another conversation.*

*Thus, for purposes of this piece, we are focused on how we identify the people who posted the digital images depicting animal cruelty as they are, at a minimum, presumptively linked to the illegal acts depicted in those images.*

****How does the bill enhance enforcement?****

The bill makes trafficking a predicate offense under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) and Travel Acts. RICO is the most powerful anti-corruption law in the United States, and has been used successfully throughout the country to target and crush organized crime. Penalties recovered from successful prosecution under these laws would be mandated to go directly into conservation efforts. The bill is structured so that the prosecution of wildlife crime would result in fund generation for the protection of wildlife, at no additional expense to the U.S. taxpayer.

****Q: How does the bill help wildlife conservation?****

The law mandates that all the fines and penalties recovered from the traffickers be used solely for enhancing wildlife conservation worldwide. The law has the potential to generate millions of dollars, which would then be invested into the protection and restoration of critically endangered species. Similar whistleblower-based laws, such as the [False Claims Act](https://www.whistleblowers.org/protect-the-false-claims-act/) and the [Foreign Corrupt Practices Act](https://www.whistleblowers.org/foreign-corrupt-practices-act/), have brought in millions of dollars annually into government coffers.

****Q: Where can I learn more about the importance of this bill?****

The National Whistleblower Center [has released a report](https://www.whistleblowers.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Wildlife_Report-Sept-2019.pdf) explaining the importance of this bill and demonstrating its potential effects to fight insidious wildlife crime.