

Utah Senate Passes Anti-Animal Rescue Bill, Following Historic Acquittal for Piglet Rescuers

H.B. 114 would change Utah's theft statute to prohibit a defense that the theft was carried out to save the life of a sick, injured or dying animal

February 9, 2023 - Salt Lake City, UT - On Thursday morning, [House Bill 114](#), "Theft Defense Amendments," passed through the full Utah Senate with nineteen yes votes, seven no votes (including all six Democrats in the Senate), and three abstentions, and it is now headed to the governor's desk. The anti-animal rescue bill would change the nature of Utah's theft statute, to preclude any defendant from raising a defense that their actions were necessary to save an animal who is "sick, injured, or a liability to the owner." The bill is a response to the historic Smithfield Trial, where [two individuals were acquitted](#) by a jury in October 2022 for rescuing two sick and dying piglets from the massive Smithfield Foods factory farm in Beaver County, Utah. HB 114 is sponsored by legislators with ties to the Utah Farm Bureau, including Rep. Carl Albrecht, who had the bill drafted at the behest of the Beaver County commissioners.

In a hearing in the Senate Judiciary and Law Enforcement Committee on Feb. 1, Lynn Carlson, one of the jurors from the Smithfield Trial, spoke in opposition to HB 114, [saying](#), "This bill is just a knee-jerk reaction because people didn't get the information and the verdict that they wanted from us as jurors." Carlson also penned an [op-ed](#) opposing the bill, which was published by *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

One of the acquitted defendants, Paul Darwin Picklesimer, said, "I'm disgusted but not surprised. In light of our acquittal for rescuing two piglets, Lily and Lizzie, from sickness and starvation at a Smithfield factory farm in Utah, legislators are trying to criminalize what Utahns know is the right thing to do."

"This anti-rescue bill goes against the will of Utah residents as evidenced by a Utah jury's unanimous acquittal last October of two animal activists who rescued sick and injured piglets from a Smithfield factory farm," says Almira Tanner, lead organizer for [Direct Action Everywhere](#). "Instead of taking action to end animal cruelty at these facilities, the legislature has made it incredibly clear that they care way more about protecting corporate profits and enabling animal abuse than they do about protecting the vulnerable and those who try to help them."

"This bill is consistent with the sort of special treatment the Utah legislature has long afforded to factory farms. The legislature has passed ag-gag laws that turned whistleblowers into criminals, they have sought to prohibit efforts to limit the growth of factory farms, and now they seek to overturn the will of a jury confronted with the abject horrors of factory farming," says animal law scholar and University of Denver law professor Justin Marceau. "The citizens of the state – nowhere better represented than a jury – are tired of the hide-and-seek game that industrial agriculture is playing. That is, they hide the suffering of animals through high walls and closed doors, and when it is finally exposed they seek legal protections that would prevent such exposures from ever happening again."

* * *