



LAWS FOR PAWS[®]

TEXAS HUMANE NETWORK

October 9, 2026

Fort Worth Stockyards

8:00 AM - 5:00 PM

*Includes 5 Continuing Legal Education (State Bar of Texas)
and Continuing Education (Texas Department of State Health Services) Hours*



Welcome Letter from Mia

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Texas Humane Network, welcome to the **2026 Laws for Paws® Education Conference!** We are honored to host animal professionals, legal professionals, advocates, and community leaders from across Texas who share a commitment to creating a more humane Texas for animals. Your presence represents the dedication of those who work daily to protect animals, uphold the law, educate their communities, and create meaningful change.

We know animals rely on you, but your communities do as well. Whether you are responding to an animal cruelty case, enforcing the law, representing a client, caring for animals, or advocating for stronger protections, your work impacts far beyond the animals in your care. The Laws for Paws Education Conference was created to unite those on the front lines of animal welfare and provide the knowledge, tools, and connections needed to make a greater impact in your community.

Our mission at the Texas Humane Network is to promote the humane treatment of animals through education, training, and outreach. This conference is an extension of that mission. Through expert presentations, continuing education, specialized legal and advocacy tracks, and discussion about laws affecting animals at the local, state, and federal levels, we hope you leave better equipped to turn knowledge into action. Most importantly, we hope you leave inspired by the people here and the difference we can make when we work together.

Protecting animals is not easy. It requires persistence, collaboration, and a commitment to keep learning and moving forward. Thank you for the work you do daily, for investing in your education and the future of animal welfare, and for being part of a growing community of Texans committed to making a difference.

Together, we can create stronger communities and better outcomes for animals across Texas.

With gratitude,

Mia Bendixsen

Mia B. Bendixsen, J.D.
Executive Director



CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

8:00-9:00 AM	Registration and Breakfast <i>Stampede Ballroom</i>	Meera Nandlal, Emcee <i>Board of Directors Texas Humane Legislation Network</i>
9:00-9:15 AM	Welcome <i>Stampede Ballroom</i>	Mia B. Bendixsen <i>Executive Director</i>
9:15-12:30 PM	Morning Breakouts	See Schedule
12:30-1:30 PM	Keynote Speaker & Lunch <i>Stampede Ballroom</i>	John Goodwin <i>Senior Managing Director Humane World for Animals</i>
1:30-2:30 PM	Prosecuting Animal Cruelty Cases Panel <i>Stampede Ballroom</i>	Courtney Burns, CAWA <i>Chief Investigator, Animal Cruelty Investigations Unit SPCA of Texas</i> Byron O’Neal <i>Assistant County Attorney Fort Bend County Attorney’s Office</i> DanaMarie Pannella <i>Attorney Holland & Muirden</i>
2:30-2:45 PM	Break	
2:45-4:30 PM	Afternoon Breakouts	See Schedule
4:30-5:00 PM	Door Prizes and Closing <i>Stampede Ballroom</i>	Board of Directors

9:15 AM -10:00 AM

Kill Pens, the Slaughter Pipeline, and Other Equine Welfare Issues

Jaime Olin | Attorney, Stris & Maher; Vice President and Legislative Chair, Texas Humane Legislation Network

Horses and other equines can slip through the cracks in Texas animal cruelty cases, despite growing awareness of dog and cat welfare issues. Topics include equine investigations, including at auctions or “kill pens,” laws impacting Texas equines, the current status of screwworms and the horse slaughter pipeline through Texas, and safety net programs for horses.

10:45 AM -11:15 AM

Lack of Exotic Animal Laws

Kati Krouse | Founder and Executive Director of BEARS Etc.

Exotic animal laws in Texas remain dangerously limited, with weak regulations and inconsistent enforcement leaving communities, first responders, and wildlife at risk. Texas Humane Network’s education and outreach efforts aim to close these gaps, strengthen public safety, and advance humane policy statewide.

11:15 AM -11:45 AM

Red Cross Disaster with Animals

Jacob Balderas | Regional Pet Sheltering Lead, American Red Cross Texas Gulf Coast Region

Disasters affect not only people but also the pets who depend on them, as seen in events such as Hurricane Katrina, where concern for pet safety often delayed evacuations. The American Red Cross has strengthened disaster operations to intentionally incorporate pets into sheltering and response, including the role of dedicated pet services personnel working alongside emergency management and animal-welfare organizations. Attendees will gain insight into how the Red Cross works to keep families and pets together and ensure disaster-affected households have access to needed supplies, coordination, and support.

11:45 AM - 12:30 PM

Lobbying 101

Ryan Jackson | Senior Legislative Manager, ASPCA

Influencing animal-related policy in Texas takes a practical understanding of how to engage lawmakers, build relationships, and advance humane legislation. Participants will gain the tools needed to navigate the Capitol, strengthen advocacy efforts, and drive meaningful change for animals statewide.

9:15 AM - 10:00 AM

Emotional Support Animal Update & Who Owns Fido?

Randy Turner | Attorney, Randy Turner Law; Board of Directors, Texas Humane Legislation Network

When relationships break down, or animals enter the shelter system, determining legal ownership of a dog can become complicated. Real-world scenarios, including gifts, joint ownership, fosters, strays, and cruelty seizures, illustrate how courts resolve these disputes. An update on Emotional Support Animals (ESA) is also included, covering changes following the repeal of United States Department of Housing and Urban Development's ESA rules, what protections remain, and how to navigate the new landscape.

10:45 AM - 11:30 AM

Federal Laws Affecting Animal Welfare

Jaime Olin | Attorney, Stris & Maher; Vice President and Legislative Chair, Texas Humane Legislation Network

Federal bills affecting animals nationwide carry significant implications for animal welfare work in Texas. Topics include the Farm Bill, the SAFE Act, the FBI Animal Cruelty Task Force Act, and other bills currently pending in Congress.

11:30 AM - 12:30 PM

From Idea to Enactment—Tips and Tools for Drafting Legislation

Rebecca Whitehouse | Attorney, Board of Directors, Texas Humane Network

Kolby Monnig | Senior Director of Government Relations, Texas Humane Legislation Network

Drafting effective legislation at the state level in Texas requires practical knowledge and skills, including structuring statutory amendments and applying Texas-specific legislative drafting conventions. Additional topics include anticipating constitutional, statutory, and regulatory issues, analyzing legislative intent, and avoiding ambiguity. Tools for developing clear definitions and enforcement provisions are also covered, preparing legislation that is legally sound and more likely to withstand legal and policy scrutiny.

Please Welcome



Representative Nicole Collier

District 95

Nicole Collier is an attorney, small business owner, mother of three, and grandmother who has spent her career advocating for individuals and families. A single mother of two before finishing high school, Nicole was supported by her faith and family as she continued her education. She is a graduate of the University of Houston and Texas Wesleyan University School of Law, now Texas A&M University School of Law. She has spent more than 20 years serving her community and bringing her advocacy experience to the Texas Capitol.

Nicole is the first woman to represent Tarrant County's House District 95 and was re-elected to her sixth term in 2022. She previously chaired the House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence, becoming the first woman in Texas history to chair the committee since its formation in 1879. She has also chaired the Texas Legislative Black Caucus and served as Second Vice Chair of the House Democratic Caucus. Her legislative priorities include affordable housing, renters' rights, healthcare access, and criminal justice reform. Her work has earned honors including the NAACP Roy Wilkins Civil Rights Award and the Regional Legislator of the Year Award from the National Black Caucus of State Legislators.



Representative Benjamin Bumgarner

District 63

State Representative Ben Bumgarner represents House District 63, covering the southern portion of Denton County. He serves on the House Committees on Environmental Regulation and Pensions, Investments & Financial Services. A North Texas native and Flower Mound resident, Ben previously served on the Flower Mound Town Council and as Mayor Pro Tem, where he worked to lower property taxes, increase government transparency, and reduce the town's debt. He is also a small business co-owner and a graduate of Austin College.

During the 88th Legislative Session, Ben authored and passed legislation addressing human trafficking, reducing government red tape, and protecting service members' confidential information. Ben and his wife, Mindy, have one daughter, Cecelia, and four rescue pets.



Keynote Speaker

John Goodwin

*Senior Managing Director of Puppy Mills and
Equine Protection at Humane World for Animals*



**Humane
World for
Animals™**

John Goodwin is Senior Managing Director of Puppy Mills and Equine Protection at Humane World for Animals, where he leads efforts to end puppy mill cruelty and advance equine welfare. Since joining the organization in 2000, he has worked across numerous departments and has been involved in grassroots organizing, federal and state lobbying, and campaign leadership, including more than a decade directing initiatives to combat animal fighting.

Goodwin has led Humane World's puppy mills campaign since 2016, advancing policies to end the sale of puppies in pet stores and contributing to a significant decline in commercial breeding operations. In 2025, he assumed leadership of the Equine Protection program, overseeing efforts to end horse slaughter and horse soring—the intentional infliction of pain to produce an artificial high-stepping gait in show horses.

He has testified before numerous state legislatures, served as an expert witness in criminal animal fighting cases, and represented the organization as a national spokesperson.

1:30 PM - 2:30 PM – Panel Discussion (Stampede Ballroom)

Prosecuting Animal Cruelty Cases

Courtney Burns | CAWA, Chief Investigator, Animal Cruelty Investigations Unit, SPCA of Texas

Byron O'Neal | Assistant County Attorney, Fort Bend County Attorney's Office

DanaMarie Pannella | Attorney, Holland & Muirden

Learn from a panel of seasoned animal cruelty investigators and prosecuting attorneys working at the forefront of Texas cruelty cases. These experts will break down the relevant Texas laws, key considerations for investigations, evidence collection and preservation, jury selection, and witness presentation. They'll also share comparisons with how animal cruelty cases are handled in other states, giving advocates a broader perspective on best practices and emerging trends.

2:45 PM - 3:30 PM

Texas Civil Seizure Law for Animals

Carly Foster | Criminal Investigator and Board Secretary, Texas Humane Network

Seizing cruelly treated animals under Texas law requires a clear understanding of legal requirements, evidence collection, and officer safety. Best practices for protecting animals while strengthening successful prosecution are also addressed, supporting Texas Humane Network's mission to equip officers and advocates with the tools needed to intervene effectively and humanely.

3:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Policy Goals for the 90th Session

Ashley Morgan | Attorney, Board of Directors, Texas Humane Legislation Network

Rebecca Whitehouse | Attorney, Board of Directors, Texas Humane Network

Kolby Monnig | Senior Director of Government Relations, Texas Humane Legislation Network

During the 90th Legislative Session, Texas Humane Legislation Network priorities include ethical pet sales, increased spay and neuter funding, and ensuring animals used in research are offered for adoption when testing ends. Additional efforts will focus on addressing emerging animal welfare issues with bipartisan partners and building lasting protections statewide.

1:30 PM - 2:30 PM – Panel Discussion (Stampede Ballroom)

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2:45 PM - 3:30 PM

Family Acrimony & Animals

Ashley Morgan | Attorney, Cain & Scarnulis, PLLC; Board of Directors, Texas Humane Legislation Network

While animals are legally considered property, they are often regarded as family members and can also serve as valuable assets in a marital estate. Key topics include the classification of animals as community or separate property, ownership disputes in the divorce context, and temporary restraining and protective orders to protect pets. Advocacy tips and conflict prevention strategies are also covered.

3:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Deceptive Trade Protections Act: Protections for Consumers

Miranda J. Cook | Attorney, Sico Hoelscher Harris LLP

Kelly Hairfield | Attorney, Board of Directors, Texas Humane Legislation Network

The Texas Deceptive Trade Practices Act (DTPA) protects consumers from false, misleading, or deceptive business practices and plays an important role in animal welfare. Under DTPA, businesses, including pet stores, breeders, and trainers, cannot misrepresent the condition, health, origin, or treatment of animals sold or advertised. When a business misrepresents an animal's health, hides cruelty, or falsifies veterinary records, consumers may have legal remedies. While DTPA does not directly prosecute cruelty, it strengthens accountability by targeting deceptive practices that harm both animals and the people who care about them.

Speakers



Mia B. Bendixsen, J.D., is an attorney and a seasoned nonprofit leader with more than 20 years of experience and a demonstrated track record in fundraising, strategic management, and community engagement. She has held senior roles with nationally recognized organizations, including Executive Director of the American Red Cross Texas Gulf Coast Region, Director of Philanthropy for the Humane Society of the United States in New England, and Director of Development for the Boy Scouts Cradle of Liberty Council in Philadelphia. Complementing her professional experience, Mia has a deep commitment to animal welfare, serving on boards supporting animal advocacy and leading efforts to protect companion animals in times of crisis. At the American Red Cross, she served as Regional Pet Sheltering Lead, working alongside emergency managers, law enforcement, and community partners to ensure disaster response efforts kept pets safe and with their families. Mia is based in Austin and lives with her two rescue dogs, and her fiancé, Michael.



Meera Nandlal is an award-winning TV journalist, radio personality, and actress whose love of storytelling began at seven, when a teacher encouraged her to watch the evening news. Inspired by Barbara Walters and Geraldo Rivera, she pursued broadcast journalism at the University of Texas at Austin and later trained at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. Her early job caring for dogs at a boarding kennel sparked a lifelong commitment to animals. Across her media roles, Meera consistently used her platform to highlight animal issues. In 2008, she left mainstream media to serve as a shelter spokesperson, documenting cruelty and rescue stories. Today, Meera leads Meera's Animal Tribe as an Animal Welfare Journalist, giving animals a voice through compassionate storytelling.



Courtney Burns, CAWA, brings more than 26 years of experience with animals, including 16 years in animal welfare and eight in law enforcement. As Chief Investigator for the SPCA of Texas Animal Cruelty Investigations Unit and a commissioned Texas peace officer, she leads a specialized team handling complex cruelty and neglect cases statewide. Courtney oversees investigations involving severe neglect, hoarding, organized animal fighting, and other serious offenses, and provides forensic and investigative support to law enforcement and prosecutors across Texas. A TCOLE Instructor, she trains officers and animal welfare professionals on best practices in cruelty investigations. She has also testified before the Texas Legislature on key animal protection legislation, advancing stronger safeguards for animals across the state.



Miranda J. Cook is a trial lawyer at Sico Hoelscher Harris LLP, fighting for individuals against major corporations in Texas and across the country. Her advocacy has led to dozens of high-value settlements for her clients. Miranda is an experienced litigator with a broad civil practice, including product liability, commercial motor vehicle and trucking accidents, workplace injuries, and dram shop cases. She represents individuals and families in catastrophic injury and wrongful death cases nationwide, prioritizing compassion and clear communication with every client. Originally from the Rio Grande Valley, Miranda now lives in San Antonio with her husband, Moses, embracing the city's strong "familia" culture.



Carly Foster was born and raised in East Texas and has worked in law enforcement for more than a decade. She currently serves as a criminal investigator, primarily handling crimes against people, and holds both national and state certifications as an Animal Cruelty Investigator, as well as certification as an Animal Control Officer. Her work includes investigating animal cruelty cases within her jurisdiction and assisting neighboring agencies with complex investigations, giving her a practical understanding of the link between violence against animals and broader public safety. She also volunteers with local rescues, fostering and helping place hundreds of animals. A mother of three, Carly is committed to strengthening enforcement, collaboration, and responsible animal welfare policy across Texas.



Katherine "Kelly" Hairfield is a litigation attorney who has represented clients in first-party insurance, personal injury, and animal law cases. Kelly obtained her Juris Doctor from South Texas College of Law Houston (STCLH). While in law school, Kelly served as President of the STCLH chapter of the Student Animal Legal Defense Fund. Kelly holds two Bachelor's Degrees from Mississippi State University and is currently pursuing her LLM in Animal Law at Lewis & Clark Law School. Kelly shares her life with two spaniels, Molly and Kieran.



Ryan Jackson is the Senior Legislative Manager at the ASPCA. After six years in the Washington Lieutenant Governor's Office, Ryan is advocating for comprehensive animal welfare legislation in the Texas Legislature while working with his sharp, dedicated, and passionate team at the ASPCA. In his role as Senior Legislative Manager, he works on policy initiatives to advance animal welfare, engaging with lawmakers and stakeholders, and helping shape legislation that protects animals across Texas and beyond.



Kolby Monnig is a government relations and public policy professional with experience in legislative strategy, advocacy, and coalition building across Texas. As Senior Director of Government Relations for Texas Humane Legislation Network, she leads the organization's state-level legislative and public affairs efforts, working with lawmakers, stakeholders, and advocacy partners to advance animal welfare policy and strengthen protections for animals across Texas. Kolby has built a reputation for navigating complex policy issues, fostering bipartisan relationships, and leading collaborative advocacy initiatives. Her background spans public affairs, statewide policy engagement, and strategic partnership development, with a focus on creating practical solutions that drive meaningful impact. Kolby is based in the Austin area, where she lives with her husband, Kyle, and their three rescue dogs. She is passionate about animal welfare, public service, and building stronger communities across Texas.



Ashley Morgan is a trial attorney who has represented clients in a range of civil litigation cases, including personal injury/tort, construction, consumer protection, and property disputes. She is a competitive and zealous advocate for her clients. Ashley obtained her Juris Doctorate from Baylor Law School. While in law school, Ashley served as President of the Baylor chapter of the Student Animal Legal Defense Fund. Ashley also has a Master's Degree in Communication Studies and a Bachelor's Degree in International Studies from Baylor University. She is actively involved in both the local and state bar associations. She is currently the Chair of the Animal Law Sections of the State Bar of Texas and the Austin Bar Association.



Byron O'Neal is an Assistant County Attorney in the General Counsel Division of the Fort Bend County Attorney's Office. A significant focus of his practice is animal welfare enforcement, including representing Fort Bend County in animal cruelty seizure and dangerous-dog proceedings. He works closely with Animal Services personnel in evaluating cases, preparing evidence, and pursuing appropriate judicial remedies under Texas law. Byron has practiced law in Texas for more than 20 years and earned his J.D. from Texas Southern University's Thurgood Marshall School of Law and his undergraduate degree from the University of Houston.



Jaime Olin is a partner at the national law firm Stris & Maher LLP, where she practices patent and commercial litigation. Before joining the firm, she served as Legal Advocacy Counsel with the ASPCA, focusing on animal welfare litigation, animal cruelty prosecution support, and equine welfare issues. A committed educator, Jaime, has taught courses and delivered more than fifty presentations on animal cruelty laws, the LINK, and other areas of animal law. She holds a BA in Psychology and Biology from New College of Florida, an MS in Animals and Public Policy from Tufts University, and a JD from the University of Michigan, where she founded the Student Animal Legal Defense Fund chapter. Jaime has lived in Dallas since 2009, and her pampered rescue dogs continue to inspire her to improve the welfare of all Texas animals.



DanaMarie Pannella is an attorney with Holland & Muirden, a law firm based in Sharon Center, Ohio. She focuses her practice on representing individuals and organizations nationwide in a broad range of animal welfare matters. For more than a decade, she has also served in the unique role of appointed prosecutor for animal cruelty cases, successfully handling thousands of cases and securing justice for animals. She earned her Juris Doctor from Case Western Reserve University School of Law and is licensed to practice in Ohio and Texas.



Randy J. Turner is an accomplished Fort Worth attorney and one of Texas's foremost animal advocates. He is board-certified in Personal Injury Trial Law and Civil Trial Law and is an elected member of the American Board of Trial Advocates. Randy is a founding member and past chair of the State Bar of Texas Animal Law Section and a former president of the Tarrant County Trial Lawyers Association. He is a former president and current board member of the Texas Humane Legislation Network and a former vice president and current board member of the Humane Society of North Texas. Randy has represented more than 100 animal rescue organizations and wildlife sanctuaries in Texas courts, including the Supreme Court of Texas. He has also volunteered internationally on conservation projects in Borneo, Kenya, and Zimbabwe and frequently lectures and testifies on animal welfare legislation.



Rebecca Whitehouse has over 30 years of experience practicing law, with a focus on labor and employment, business-related immigration, and general business law for non-profits. She earned both her B.A. and J.D. from the University of Michigan and now maintains a solo law practice in the DFW area. She currently serves on the board of Texas Humane Network and has been active in the bar association, a Rotary club, and CASA of Collin County. Rebecca and her husband have been involved with rescue for many years and have fostered dozens of dogs of all sizes and breeds. In addition to rescue and fostering, Rebecca looks for ways to use her legal knowledge to both improve animal protection laws and seek better enforcement of existing animal welfare laws.

Thank you!



Use **this link** or scan the QR code to complete a brief survey about the conference.

#LAWSFORPAWS2026

