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Homeless pet hoarders targeted

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A homeless Kaka'ako woman who animal rights advocates say has kept as many as 19 cats in cages and shopping carts on the streets has prompted calls for stricter laws on animal hoarding among the homeless.

Animal Advocate Inc. has produced a 16-minute video highlighting the case of the Kaka'ako woman, whom they say has been hoarding cats on the streets for as many as 10 years.

The woman, who declined to give her name, counters that she takes care of cats and the occasional rabbit that would otherwise go without food and water. "I don't think it's anybody's business how many cats I have ... if I take care of my animals," said the woman, who lives on Ilalo Street.

The documentary comes as legislators are taking up a bill — written in large part in response to a host of public complaints about the Kaka'ako homeless woman — that prohibits anyone from confining pets in cages on public property for more than four hours or owning more than 10 dogs, cats or a combination of the two.

Pamela Davis, president of Animal Advocate Inc., said many homeless people have one to two pets as companions and take good care of them. But, she said, some homeless people hoard animals, keeping them in confined conditions. It is that handful of cases that concerns her.

"The bill does not prohibit homeless people from having a companion animal," said Davis, whose documentary aired on Olelo. "It's the hoarding and it's the breeding ... that really troubles us."

Davis said she knows of other homeless people who hoard pets, including a woman who has more than a dozen rabbits. But she called the Kaka'ako case the most "egregious."

Davis and her group have also criticized the Hawaiian Humane Society for not doing more to stop the situation, and said the cats in Kaka'ako should be taken away because they are not well-cared for.

But Humane Society spokeswoman Kawehi Yim said an inspector regularly checks on the cats and takes away animals that appear sick or not taken care of. The law does not allow inspectors to take away the cats simply because the woman is homeless.

"This isn't the ideal living condition for any kind of animal. However, looking at the law as it is written, until we can find an



A homeless woman has attracted attention for keeping her menagerie in cages and shopping carts at Ahui and Ilalo streets in Kaka'ako.

Photos by REBECCA BREYER |
The Honolulu Advertiser



A homeless woman keeps this rabbit in a cage at the corner of Ahui and Ilalo streets in Kaka'ako.

animal clearly in distress ... the only thing we can do is monitor the situation," Yim said. "We are following the letter of the law."

LIMITING CAGE TIME

The current law defines animal hoarding, a misdemeanor, as owning 20 cats, dogs or a combination of the two. House Bill 1510 would lower the limit for hoarding to 10, and also target homeless people who have multiple pets by restricting the amount of time a "pet animal" can be caged on public property to four hours.

Under existing law, there is no time limit on how long a pet can be kept caged on public or private property. The bill has exceptions for animals that need to be caged for safety reasons or for transport.

State Rep. Tom Brower, whose district includes Kaka'ako, said he introduced the legislation because of longtime concerns about the Kaka'ako woman and her cats. "The intent is that if you're on public property, you should not start hoarding animals," Brower said.

He added, "My heart goes out to people who may be homeless or struggling." But he said the state should be able to step in in cases like the Kaka'ako one. "I had to come up with a solution," he said.

The Hawaiian Humane Society and Brower said they have received many complaints about the Kaka'ako woman over the past several years. Davis said the woman has been homeless and had multiple cats in cages for at least a decade and perhaps longer.

Last week, the woman had at least eight cats.

They were kept in small cages or shopping carts.

Community members had mixed opinions about whether she should have to give them up.

One homeless man, who lives at the nearby Next Step shelter and declined to give his name, said she should be left alone and said that perhaps officials should be more concerned about helping the woman than about helping her cats.

But Edward White, another homeless man, thought someone should step in.

"It kind of smells over there," he said.

The woman keeps cat food and other supplies in a cart near where she lives, and there are lots of flies in the area. Makiki resident Anna Liu feeds feral cats in Kaka'ako and said she and others sometimes take a few of the cats when the woman isn't there.

Liu said she gets the cats medical care.

She said she agrees with Animal Advocate Inc., that the government needs to step in and stop the woman from keeping cats in cages. But she also said it seems strange that an entire law would be passed to target what seems like one case. "It's a terrible situation," she said. "But pass a bill on one homeless woman hoarding cats?"

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CAGED CAT
DOCUMENTARY

Animal Advocate Inc. has produced a 16-minute documentary about a homeless Kaka'ako woman who keeps multiple cats in cages.

The documentary has aired on Olelo.

It is also available at www.animaladvocateinc.org.

The documentary comes as lawmakers are considering a bill targeting the Kaka'ako case. It would ban anyone from keeping a pet in a cage on public property for more than four hours.

House Bill 1510 is awaiting a hearing.