

June 30, 2023

The Honorable John J. Flynn
Erie County District Attorney's Office
25 Delaware Ave.
Buffalo, NY 14202

Dear Mr. Flynn:

Greetings from PETA. This letter concerns a disturbing case of cruelty to animals that your office is handling, reportedly involving apparent University of Buffalo students Blake Hiligh, 19, and Zachary Pilarcek, 20. According to news sources, they each face one charge of cruelty to animals stemming from an alleged June 13 incident during which the pair were reportedly caught on video violently beating a miniature poodle with a leather belt. The dog, Kobe, was apparently seized by officials the following day and reportedly required veterinary treatment for his injuries. We understand that Pilarcek and Hiligh are scheduled to appear in court on July 27 and August 3, respectively.

As you know, mental-health professionals and top law-enforcement officials consider animal abuse to be a red flag. The American Psychiatric Association identifies cruelty to animals as one of the diagnostic criteria for conduct disorders, and the FBI uses reports of such crimes in analyzing the threat potential of suspected and known criminals and has recently categorized cruelty to animals in its national felony crimes database alongside arson and homicide. The link between animal abuse and interpersonal violence is undeniable, and the safety of the community is better secured by vigorous prosecution of these cases.

We respectfully ask that if convicted, the defendants, in addition to receiving the maximum penalty allowable, undergo psychiatric intervention (and anger-management classes, if applicable) at their own expense. Most importantly, given the high rate of recidivism among animal abusers, we ask that sentencing include a prohibition against owning or harboring animals for as long as possible (a common provision in such cases).

On behalf of PETA's more than 361,000 members and supporters in New York, thank you for your time and consideration and for the difficult work that you do.

Sincerely,



Kristin Rickman
Emergency Response Team Director
Cruelty Investigations Department
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