



PRESS RELEASE

June 5, 2022

Animal cruelty, & violence: a missed dangerous connection to mass shootings

Alexandria, VA. – The Small and Rural Law Enforcement Executives Association (SRLEEA) is deeply saddened by the tragic loss of life in Uvalde, Texas. Salvador Ramos, the accused mass shooter who carried out this horrible attack at Robb Elementary School, allegedly committed animal abuse and displayed videos of the cruelty to users on social media before the attack.

On May 14, 2022, Payton Gendron also posted details of animal abuse before he shot 13 people, killing ten and wounding three in Buffalo, New York. Ethan Crumbley murdered four students and wounded seven others at Oxford High School in Michigan on November 30, 2021. According to the court filings, Crumbley tortured animals and even kept a baby bird's head in a jar on his bedroom floor, which he later took and placed in a school bathroom. In 2018 Nikolas Cruz allegedly killed 17 people and injured 17; he reportedly had a long history of abusing animals. On Instagram, he boasted about killing animals and posted images of dead ones. The list of mass murderers who abused animals goes back for decades, including Columbine killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold; Kip Kinkel; and Luke Woodham, the Mississippi school shooter who described in his journal how he tortured and killed his dog by beating it in a plastic bag and setting it on fire. This link cannot be ignored anymore!

"We never did consider animal crimes," John Thompson, retire police chief said about his first 30 years in law enforcement. "We always thought it should be left up to animal control. We never made a connection."

SRLEEA continues to be concerned about how these school shooters and mass murderers keep slipping through the cracks when the warning signs are in plain sight. These horrible and heartbreaking tragedies remind us of how acts of animal abuse are linked to more serious violent crimes against people. Equally alarming is the lack of investment in our nation's mental health system and the over-reliance on law enforcement, both of which add to this recipe for ongoing tragedies.

In July 2018, the Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team (JCAT) of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, in its First Responder's Toolkit, advised law enforcement that animal cruelty could be a warning behavior for terrorism or other acts of premeditated violence against humans. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently looked into animal cruelty as a data element in its National Violent Death Reporting System. A search of that database reveals a correlation between animal abuse and some violent deaths.

Law enforcement has increasingly been working with groups like the Animal Welfare Institute, the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, the Animal Legal Defense Fund, the Humane Society of the United States, and the National Link Coalition to fight animal cruelty. SRLEEA is privileged to partner with these stakeholders to provide valuable services to law enforcement in the areas of investigations, training, and legislation. This latest mass shooting incident illustrates how important it is to treat animal cruelty as a serious crime and to understand how real the link is.

"If you pay attention to animal cruelty, you may be able to identify – or even avert – other crimes more quickly, said Sheriff Michael Brown, SRLEEA President."

SRLEEA is planning a training session for law enforcement on the red flags of mass shooters on July 13, 2022.

The Small & Rural Law Enforcement Executive Association (SRLEEA) is a professional organization of police executives representing small, rural, and tribal agencies in the United States. The SRLEEA provides an exclusive opportunity for small, rural, and tribal police chiefs, sheriffs, and law enforcement officials to advocate for, strengthen, unite, and raise the capacity of their agencies and the communities they serve.

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