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## AZ Bill Aims to Protect Dogs in Hot Cars

Jodie Snyder | June 15, 2017



Photo by Rusty Clark

A metro Phoenix community college teacher's civics assignment wound up helping create a law to aid dogs trapped in hot cars.

Debra Nolen, who teaches ethics, suggested her students find ways to help dogs left behind in locked vehicles.

"I wanted to find a topic for them to learn about civic engagement and social responsibility and this seemed perfect," she said.

Complete newcomers to politics, students and teacher contacted Nolen's state legislator, John Kavanagh, who had previously supported other animal-welfare laws. He agreed to sponsor their bill and other Arizona animal-rights groups got behind it.

Under the new law, someone who uses "reasonable force" to break into an unattended motor vehicle is not subject to civil damages if there's a "good faith belief" a child or animal "is in imminent danger of suffering

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physical injury or death.”

Would-be rescuers must first notify police, medical personnel or, if needed, animal control officers. Then, after entering the vehicle, they must remain until responders arrive.

Previously, Arizona laws weren't clear if a Good Samaritan could be sued for damaging property while rescuing a trapped animal.



Now, 29 states [have some type of a “hot car” law](#) on the books, according to the Animal Legal Defense Fund. Laws vary; some make distinctions between domesticated animals versus livestock; some differentiate between law-enforcement personnel and citizen rescuers.

“In the last few years, there has been an explosion in the number of hot-car laws,” said Lora Dunn, director of the criminal justice program for the fund. “There’s greater awareness, people are getting involved and pushing their lawmakers.”

But it’s not always easy.

Some Arizona legislators questioned why animals warranted the same expectation of protection as humans.

“I actually had one legislator describe pets as ‘chattel,’” Nolen said. “I had to tell him how so many people have sacrificed their own well-being on behalf of their pets.”

Having Arizona’s governor talk up the legislation in his State of the State address helped push it past those ideological obstacles, Kavanagh said. Nolen’s participation too was key, he said. “She was a like a bulldog on this.”

All part of the learning process, says Nolen. “My kids learned so much from this, how to be active in their communities for good. I look at them and think ‘these are tomorrow’s leaders.’”

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Jodie Snyder is a Phoenix-based freelance writer. She is the author of Happy Dog Phoenix, which benefits local animal rescues.

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