

BOWIE'S ACT

Recognize Pets as Companions - Not Property

PETITION TO THE SOUTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

**An Act to Recognize Pets as Companion Animals Rather Than Ordinary Personal
Property**

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A citizen proposal asking South Carolina lawmakers to create a distinct legal status for companion animals while preserving responsible care, public safety, and animal-welfare obligations.

A pet is a living companion.

Its value is more than a price tag.

South Carolina law should recognize the difference.

PASS BOWIE'S ACT

Companions. Not Property.

PETITION TO THE SOUTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

To the Honorable Members of the South Carolina House of Representatives and South Carolina Senate:

We, the undersigned residents and supporters of the State of South Carolina, respectfully petition the South Carolina General Assembly to introduce, consider, and enact legislation to be known as “Bowie’s Act.”

PURPOSE OF BOWIE’S ACT

South Carolina law has historically treated household pets, including dogs and cats, as personal property. That classification does not fully reflect the modern relationship between people and the animals who share their homes and lives.

Companion animals are living beings who provide affection, comfort, emotional support, assistance, protection, and companionship. Their significance to a household is fundamentally different from ordinary possessions such as furniture, vehicles, or other replaceable property.

Bowie’s Act asks the General Assembly to create a distinct legal classification for qualifying companion animals while continuing to impose all appropriate responsibilities for care, veterinary treatment, licensing, animal control, public safety, and humane treatment.

WHAT WE ARE ASKING THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO DO

1. Create the Legal Status of “Companion Animal”

South Carolina law should define a “companion animal” substantially as follows:

“Companion animal” means a domesticated animal, including but not limited to a dog or cat, who is kept primarily for companionship, affection, emotional support, assistance, or as a member of a household, rather than primarily for commercial or agricultural purposes.

2. Recognize Companion Animals as More Than Ordinary Property

Bowie’s Act should establish that a companion animal is a living companion and a distinct legal category under South Carolina law, and should not be classified solely as ordinary personal property.

A companion animal is a living companion and shall constitute a distinct legal category under the laws of this State. A companion animal shall not be classified solely as ordinary personal property.

3. Amend Property-Based Terminology in South Carolina Law

Where current statutes rely on property-based terminology to identify the person legally responsible for a pet, Bowie's Act should use terminology centered on lawful custody, care, and responsibility.

“Custodian” or “guardian” means a person who has lawful custody of, responsibility for, or a recognized caregiving relationship with a companion animal; keeps or harbors the companion animal; provides for the animal’s care; or otherwise acts as the animal’s lawful custodian.

Nothing in this change should relieve a person responsible for a companion animal from vaccination, licensing, veterinary-care, animal-control, public-safety, or other legal responsibilities.

4. Recognize Companionship in Legal Disputes

When a South Carolina court is required to determine lawful custody or possession of a companion animal, Bowie's Act should permit consideration of the animal's welfare and caregiving relationship, including:

- Who has primarily cared for the companion animal;
- Who provides food, shelter, veterinary care, medication, exercise, and daily care;
- The length and stability of the relationship between the animal and each person;
- The emotional bond between the companion animal and the persons involved;
- The ability of each person to provide a safe and appropriate home;
- Any history of animal cruelty, abuse, neglect, domestic violence, or abandonment; and
- The health, safety, welfare, and continued well-being of the companion animal.

5. Recognize the Special Value of a Companion Animal

When a companion animal is intentionally, recklessly, or negligently killed or seriously injured by another person, South Carolina law should not automatically reduce the animal's legal value to purchase price or market value alone. Subject to reasonable limits established by the General Assembly, a court should be permitted to consider:

- Reasonable veterinary and emergency medical expenses;
- The animal's age, health, training, and special characteristics;
- The animal's special value to the person responsible for the animal;
- Loss of companionship when authorized by the circumstances and applicable law; and
- The seriousness and nature of the conduct that caused the injury or death.

6. Preserve Responsible Care and Public-Safety Laws

Bowie's Act should not eliminate the legal responsibilities associated with caring for an animal. Guardians and custodians would continue to be responsible for:

- Rabies vaccinations and other legally required veterinary measures;
- Licensing requirements;
- Leash and animal-control laws;
- Injuries caused by an animal when liability otherwise exists;
- Humane treatment requirements; and
- Compliance with state and local animal-welfare and public-safety laws.

7. Supersede the Old Ordinary-Personal-Property Rule

Bowie's Act should state that, to the extent South Carolina common law treats a qualifying companion animal exclusively as ordinary personal property, that rule is superseded by the public policy established in the Act.

Companion animals are living companions whose legal status deserves consideration beyond ordinary personal property.

WHY BOWIE'S ACT MATTERS

South Carolina courts have continued to apply the longstanding rule that dogs are personal property. Recent appellate decisions have also recognized that changing this public policy is a matter for the General Assembly.

Bowie's Act asks elected lawmakers to make that change carefully and responsibly - not by eliminating accountability, but by recognizing that companion animals occupy a unique place in modern households.

A pet is not a chair.

A pet is not a television.

A pet is not simply an item with a resale value.

A pet is a living companion.

OUR PETITION

We, the undersigned, respectfully call upon the South Carolina General Assembly to introduce, consider, and enact “Bowie's Act,” legislation establishing companion animals as a distinct legal category rather than ordinary personal property under South Carolina law.

We further request that South Carolina law recognize companionship, caregiving relationships, animal welfare, and the special value of companion animals when courts and government agencies make decisions affecting them.

Pets are companions.

Their lives have value beyond a price tag.

It is time for South Carolina law to recognize the difference.

PASS BOWIE'S ACT

Recognize Pets as Companions - Not Property.

PETITION ORGANIZER INFORMATION

Organizer: Hunter Michael Meyer , Samantha Marie Soule

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Circulation note: This document is a citizen legislative advocacy petition. Signatures are intended to demonstrate public support and encourage introduction and passage of legislation by the South Carolina General Assembly. This petition itself does not amend the South Carolina Code.

BOWIE'S ACT - PETITION SIGNATURES

Companions. Not Property.

By signing below, I support the introduction and passage of Bowie's Act by the South Carolina General Assembly.

Printed Name	City / County	Signature	Date

Petition Organizer: Hunter Michael Meyer, Samantha Marie Soule

Contact Email / Phone: bowiesact@gmail.com

BOWIE'S ACT - ADDITIONAL SIGNATURES

Recognize Pets as Companions - Not Property.

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