

MEMPHIS FLYER EDITORIAL , NOVEMBER 2011:

Animalhood

"You can't legislate morality," said Shelby County commissioner Terry Roland last week, speaking in opposition to a proposal by the apparently indefatigable Steve Mulroy for a strict county ordinance against the mistreatment of animals.

That some such action is necessary is demonstrated by the fact, as indicated by this week's *Flyer* article "Basic Needs," of some 4,000 cases of animal neglect and cruelty that have been brought before the county's Environmental Court over the last three years. And regrettably few of the cases have been brought to any kind of full resolution because, as Cindy Sanders of Community Action for Animals stated to the commission, there are no laws specific enough to enforce against these improper actions.

To quote from the article by Bianca Phillips, "The ordinance requires pet owners to feed and provide fresh water for their animals daily, provide them relief from extreme temperatures, pick up pet waste, and groom animals to avoid health risks."

That such modest common-sense requirements should become controversial is peculiar in itself. And as for the notion that morality cannot be "legislated," we have pointed out before the obvious fact that most legislation does just that, setting bounds on what is proper conduct — which is to say, "moral" — in an organized society.

"Personhood," a term employed in some recent would-be morality legislation in Mississippi, proved to be ambiguous as defined. "Animalhood" is easier to describe; it usually walks on four legs and sometimes wags its tail, if treated right.