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Baltimore City State's Attorney Office, Police Department, Mayor Sheila Dixon and The City Council:

Thank you for accepting my comments about the West Baltimore twin brothers, 17, accused of soaking a pit bull terrier named Phoenix in gasoline before setting her afire. Police officer Syreeta Teel, who spotted the one-year-old pup in the Sandtown Winchester neighborhood, heroically draped her sweatshirt over Phoenix and pounded out the flames.

I am aware this 5/27/09 incident has drawn more public outcry than some human victim crimes. Officials are concerned about misconstrued priorities.

With all due respect, they have missed the point: This case IS about humans. It is about adolescents so desensitized to suffering, they will kill again.

I call upon police and prosecutors to fully investigate this calculated act of violence. If the suspects are tied to a dogfighting ring, as Commissioner Bealefeld has suggested due to puncture wounds seen on Phoenix, please charge them under animal fighting laws as well as aggravated cruelty to animals. I urge you to prosecute them as adults subject to felony cruelty laws that carry up to three years in prison, a \$5,000 fine, and mandatory counseling. Both youths should be barred from contact with animals.

As you know, burns over 95% of the dog's swollen, charred body overwhelmed her immune system. Still, Phoenix wagged her tail as her kidneys failed. She was euthanized in loving hands, perhaps the only she'd ever known.

Phoenix "rose from the ashes" long enough to reveal where violence begins — especially for young males who later commit brutal crimes against people. Columbine shooter Eric Harris, 18, smashed mice with a crowbar and set them on fire. Washington D.C. serial killer Lee Boyd Malvo killed stray cats with a slingshot. As a teen, Jason Massey slaughtered 37 cats, 29 dogs and six cows; at 20 he decapitated and disemboweled a girl, 13, and shot a boy, 14.

Lighting an animal on fire is a "particularly significant predictor of violent and even homicidal behavior," says Dr. Randall Lockwood of ASPCA Anti-Cruelty Initiatives and a frequent consultant for cruelty investigators, law enforcers and mental health professionals.

In closing, I urge Mayor Dixon and the City Council to address violence at its roots through: Creation of an animal abuse task force with citizen representation; empowerment of animal control officers under the police department; and prosecution in all animal abuse and fighting cases.

Thank you for punishing those responsible for the killing of Phoenix to the fullest degree allowed by law.

Sincerely,