

SHELLY'S LAW
COALITION

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What happened, and why Illinois law needs to change

A man convicted of felony animal torture was sentenced to 54 months in prison and released to mandatory supervised release the same day he entered the Illinois Department of Corrections. Existing Illinois law permitted this outcome. This fact sheet summarizes the verified record and the two reforms that Shelly's Law Coalition are asking the Illinois General Assembly to pass.

THE CASE

People v. Thomas Martel, No. 23 CR 0852301, Circuit Court of Cook County, Criminal Division. The charges arose from alleged conduct between May and June 2023 involving multiple kittens. The defendant pleaded guilty on June 22, 2026, and was sentenced the following day.

THE COURT RECORD

- 1. Charged with 10 felony counts:** five counts of animal torture (Class 3 felonies) and five counts of aggravated cruelty to animals (Class 4 felonies), under 510 ILCS 70/3.02 and related provisions. The charges involved multiple kitten victims.
- 2. Pled guilty to two counts.** The plea resolved the case based on a single kitten victim, with one conviction for animal torture and one conviction for aggravated cruelty to animals. The remaining eight counts were dismissed as part of the agreement.
- 3. Sentenced to 54 months.** Per Illinois Department of Corrections records, Martel was admitted on June 23, 2026 and released to parole (mandatory supervised release) the same day, with a projected discharge of December 23, 2026. He was credited with 1,079 days at sentencing. Pretrial custody credit and day-for-day sentence credit combined to produce that result.
- 4. Held on electronic monitoring before trial.** The certified transcript shows that, before sentencing, the defendant was released on electronic monitoring while awaiting trial. Under Illinois law, the time he spent on electronic monitoring was credited toward his prison sentence.

WHAT PROSECUTORS ALLEGED

The following allegations come from the State's proffer in open court. Because the case ended in a guilty plea, they were not tested at trial or adjudicated by a jury.

According to prosecutors, the defendant obtained a series of kittens. The State alleged he named each kitten "Shelly," and that a witness observed the alleged conduct over several weeks. The State alleged the kittens were placed in a water-filled bathtub. Prosecutors also described incriminating videos recovered from the witness's phone, including a Snapchat video showing the defendant's face with a caption, and another video the State described as depicting a decapitated kitten. The alleged victims were described as approximately eight-week-old kittens.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Multiple alleged victims. One conviction involving a single kitten. The remaining charges were dismissed as part of the plea agreement. A 54-month prison sentence resulted in no time actually served in prison. No judge, prosecutor, or correctional official acted outside the law. The outcome was permitted by Illinois law as written.

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THE TWO REFORMS

What Shelly's Law would do

1. End prison credit for pretrial home electronic monitoring in felony animal torture cases

Under current Illinois law, time spent on home electronic monitoring before trial may count toward a prison sentence. In cases like this, that credit can eliminate time that would otherwise be served in prison. Shelly's Law would prohibit that credit from applying in felony animal torture cases, so a prison sentence requires actual time in prison.

2. Strengthen sentencing when there are multiple animal victims

Illinois law generally allows sentences for multiple animal victims to run at the same time (concurrently). When a defendant tortures or kills more than one animal, each victim should be reflected in the sentence. In this case, the court advised the defendant that if every count ran consecutively, his maximum sentencing exposure was 40 years. Instead, the sentences imposed ran concurrently. Shelly's Law would expand the availability of consecutive sentences in cases involving multiple animal victims, so the punishment more accurately reflects every life taken.

WILL YOU SIGN?

We are gathering signatures from Illinois residents to demonstrate public support for Shelly's Law and deliver that support to the Illinois General Assembly. By signing, you are asking your Illinois state representative and state senator to introduce and support these reforms. Every signature helps show lawmakers that Illinois residents want stronger protection for animals.

Learn more and sign online: [ShellysLaw.org](https://shellyslaw.org)

Justice for every Shelly. Stronger protection for every animal.

People v. Thomas Martel, No. 23 CR 0852301 (Circuit Court of Cook County); certified transcripts of proceedings dated August 19, 2025, and June 22, 2026; Illinois Department of Corrections inmate records. Allegations identified as such are drawn from the State's August 19, 2025 proffer and were not adjudicated at trial. Reform citations: 730 ILCS 5/5-4.5-100(b); 730 ILCS 5/5-8-4. Prepared by Shelly's Law Coalition.