

## **N.H. cruelty offender released from probation**

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*By PATRICK McARDLE Rutland Herald*

BENNINGTON — A former New Hampshire man who was convicted of animal cruelty after police found that he was taking 32 German shepherds across the state in a school bus was granted an early discharge from probation on Thursday but is still barred for more than two years from owning pets.

Larry Mason, 54, was convicted of three counts of animal cruelty after a jury trial in Bennington District Court in January 2007.

In February 2007, Mason was placed on probation for four years with conditions that included a prohibition against owning pets while he was on probation.

Public Defender Frederick Bragdon said on Thursday that because Mason had done well on probation, he had applied for and been granted an early discharge.

However, Bragdon said Mason had agreed to accept the continuing condition that he not own animals until the end of the period for which he was placed on probation.

Bragdon said if Mason were found to own animals before February 2011, it would not be a violation of probation but contempt of court.

Mason was cited after Mason stopped at a diner in Bennington and police were called because of the large number of dogs.

According to Mason, his plan was to make his way to the Western United States where he would look for a church in need of a pastor that had enough room for him to keep his dogs.

Police said the conditions on the bus were overly crowded and unsanitary.

Bennington District Court ordered Mason to forfeit the 32 dogs. Mason appealed the forfeiture ruling and his conviction for animal cruelty to the Vermont Supreme Court, but the court upheld the order and the conviction.

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