

Bristol woman who lost 36 dogs in two fires pleads not guilty to animal cruelty charges

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JENNIFER CHOATE

BRISTOL — A local woman has pleaded not guilty to five charges of animal cruelty, including to leaving 29 German shepherd dogs inside an unoccupied structure with heat lamps attached to the cages that caused a fire that killed all of them in December.

The fire was the second in just over three weeks at the 90 Chestnut St. residence of Jennifer “Bobbi” Choate.

On Nov. 22, the Bristol Fire Department responded to a fire in the main house on the property that killed nine dogs and that rendered the structure uninhabitable.

Choate, who formerly owned and operated Tarawood Kennels in Halifax, Mass., then moved 29 of the surviving dogs into a small cottage, where they perished in a Dec. 13 blaze.

During their response to that fire, Bristol police discovered and then seized nine dogs that were being kept in the unheated basement of the main house. Those dogs were transferred to the custody of the New Hampshire Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Stratham.

Choate was scheduled to be arraigned Monday in Plymouth District Court, but court officials said Choate last week waived arraignment on the charges, which also include animal cruelty charges because she failed to provide adequate shelter to the dogs in the main house when temperatures were 12 degrees above zero or lower; for keeping seven dogs in metal cages in which the canines could not retain “natural body heat;” for not dealing with one dog’s ear infection despite being directed to do so previously by police; and for not providing medical care to a dog that resulted in the emergency amputation of a paw.

Choate is scheduled to appear in court on Feb. 15 for a trial management conference.

In a separate but related matter, Choate faces nearly two dozen counts of animal cruelty that were brought earlier this month by the Alexandria Police Department.

Following the execution of a search warrant at a barn that Choate rents on Burns Hill Road, Alexandria police said that on Jan. 2 they discovered 22 dogs inside an unheated space while the temperature outside was around 11 degrees below zero.

Those dogs are also being kept at the NHHS. Choate is to be arraigned on the Alexandria charges in Plymouth District Court on Feb. 12.

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