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ANIMAL CAREERS



Ledy VanKavage

Lobbyist/Lawyer

You may not know exactly what it means to LOBBY, but it's something that many people, yourself included, do every day. When you try to convince your parents that you need a new pair of jeans or the P-Diddy CD that just came out, you're LOBBYING! That's kind of what Ledy VanKavage, Director of the ASPCA's Midwest Government Affairs and Public Policy office, does. The difference is that when Ledy lobbies, she's trying to convince legislators to pass laws that protect animals.

So what does she do?:

As Director of the ASPCA's Midwest Government Affairs and Public Policy Office, Ledy finds places where laws are weak and then figure out how they can be improved to help animals. Next, she drafts up wording for a bill, in which she writes down her suggestions for a new or improved law, and heads off to the state capital to find animal-friendly legislators who agree with her. If they decide to back the bill, it has to be voted on in order to become a law. That's when Ledy REALLY works on her lobbying skills! "I then talk to as many legislators as I can, trying to get them to vote for the bill," she says.

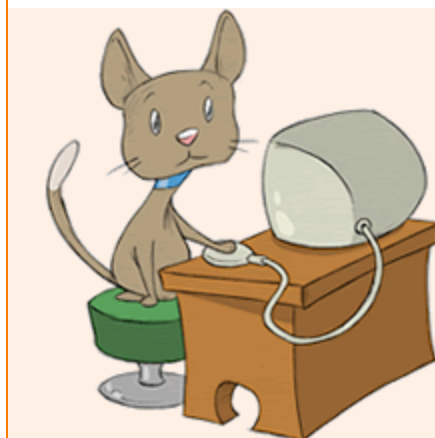
P.S. Did we mention that she has to do this for 14 different states?! "There are hundreds of bills introduced in each state that pertain to animals, so it gets overwhelming."

What kind of skills are required for this job?:

Ledy had to study to become a lawyer, and earned her "juris doctorate" degree in law. "Law school takes three years, and it's like intellectual boot camp. It's hard!"

Best thing that ever happened on the job?:

"Getting a bill signed into law that was the first of its kind in the

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nation," says Ledy. She's referring to the Companion Animal Hoarder Bill that became a law in Illinois in August 2001. You may have heard about people who have more animals than they can care for and keep bringing home more and more—sometimes 30, or even 40, animals! Under the new law that Ledy and the ASPCA helped pass, these people have to go for psychological counseling.

This law also increases the punishment for animal abuse and allows police officers to take away cars from people who are involved in dog fighting. Ledy was speaking at a meeting in Chicago, explaining all about the new law to people who want to help stop dog fighting, when she was in for a surprise. "Three convicted dog fighters showed up to the meeting!" she says. "They wanted to know about the new laws, too. When I talked about the police being able to take away their cars, their eyes grew as big as saucers! It was truly rewarding!"

How she first got involved helping animals:

A long-time, big-time animal lover, Ledy had graduated from law school and was working for the government when she learned that her county pound was selling dogs and cats to research facilities! This is called "pound seizure." Ledy organized citizens to stop this practice from taking place, but then realized that the number of animals adopted from the pound was very small. Her group then decided to start a humane society, and built an animal shelter on an acre of land donated by the county. (Does this woman make things happen, or what?!) "We now adopt out about 1,700 animals a year!" Ledy is proud to report.

Any advice for aspiring lawyers?:

Ledy gets VERY specific here! "Study hard, but be involved and volunteer at your local animal shelter," she recommends. "You need to understand the workings of an animal shelter to know what laws can hurt or help them. When you're in law school, work at the district attorney's office, prosecutor's office or police department. Make waves!"