



**J. HANLEY**

WINNEBAGO COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY

**PRESS RELEASE**

**March 4, 2024**

**State's Attorney J. Hanley**

Winnebago County State's Attorney J. Hanley announces that the Honorable Judge Randy Wilt sentenced **Cortez J. Houston (DOB: 9/6/1988)** to three years in the Illinois Department of Corrections for Aggravated Cruelty, Cruel Treatment and Violation of Owner's Duties. Houston was found guilty of the offenses after a jury trial in August of 2023.

On December 29, 2020, Winnebago County Animal Control Officers responded to a residence in the 3000 block of Bildahl Avenue in Rockford after an animal complaint. In the back yard, they observed an area where at least three dogs were kept. These dogs were emaciated and without proper food and water. Officers also located the body of a deceased dog in the back yard which was being consumed by the other emaciated dogs.

On January 13, 2021, Winnebago County Animal Control responded to a residence in the 2600 block of Lapey Street in Rockford. The defendant, Cortez Houston, resided at the residence. Officers located a deceased pit pull mix dog, and another dog that was incredibly thin with no food or water sources. A necropsy on the deceased dog showed it died as a result of starvation. There was no food found in the dog's gastrointestinal tract, indicating that the dog had not consumed any food for at least 24 hours. The dog's stomach contained sticks. During the investigation, it was determined that all of the animals involved belonged to the defendant, Cortez Houston.

Aggravated Cruelty is a Class 4 Felony that is punishable by 1-6 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections followed by 6 months of Mandatory Supervised Release.

Cruel Treatment is a Class A Misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in the Winnebago County Jail or probation.

Violation of Owner's Duties is a Class B Misdemeanor that is also punishable by probation or a jail sentence.

Winnebago County Animal Control Officers conducted the investigation in this case. Assistant State's Attorney Emily Palmer handled the prosecution.

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