



Episode 118: Animal Law with Pamela Hart

Alison Monahan: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today, we're talking with Pamela Hart, Director of the Animal Law Program at the Animal Legal Defense Fund. Your Law School Toolbox host is Alison Monahan and normally I'm here with Lee Burgess, my cohost. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience so that you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#) and the Career Dicta career website. I also run [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a [review](#) on iTunes or your favorite listening app. And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can always reach us via the [contact form on lawschooltoolbox.com](#) and we would love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Welcome back. Today we're talking with Pamela Hart, Director of the Animal Law Program at the Animal Legal Defense Fund. Well, first off, this is a really interesting area of law. How did you get involved in animal law and what exactly does that even cover?

Pamela Hart: Well, it started for me, like it does with a lot of people, with the adoption of a companion animal. His name was Max. I had adopted him when I lived in New York City and he had come from an abused and neglected type of situation and I didn't really understand how anyone could hurt this innocent animal. And having Max for almost 17 years in my life really taught me to appreciate the bond between ourselves as humans with our companion animals. And it opened my eyes to the link between family violence and animal cruelty.

So, while I was in law school, I met up with another law student and we shared our interests on wanting to use our law degrees to advocate for animals. So, while we were in law school, we started a non-profit called Sheltering Animas of Abuse Victims, which focused on the link between domestic violence and animal cruelty. And through this program, people are able to put their companion animals and sometimes farm animals into safe sanctuaries so they can leave abusive situations and get themselves to safety. The goal of this program is to reunite everybody at the end of it and in a safe location.

Alison Monahan: And is that something that you see people who are in abusive relationships ... It seems like that is probably one of their key reasons for not leaving?

Pamela Hart: It's absolutely a key reason. One in four victims of domestic violence say that they delayed getting to safe havens due to concern for their animals. So, if we can remove that very important barrier or obstacle to getting people to safety,

it really can have a tremendous impact. So, my work with the link really opened my eyes to the plight of other species from wildlife to farmed animals to animals in research. So, I always like to say Max nudged me down my path in animal law.

- Alison Monahan: Interesting. And what is the name of that organization? Does it still exist? If people are interested in finding out more about it?
- Pamela Hart: Sure. It's [Sheltering Animals of Abuse Victims or SAAV](#). It does still exist. We just celebrated our 15-year anniversary.
- Alison Monahan: Oh, congratulations.
- Pamela Hart: Yeah, thank you. And we're pleased to have hundreds of animals go through the program and into safer locations.
- Alison Monahan: Oh, that's amazing. And we'll definitely link to that in the show notes if people want to learn more about that.
- Pamela Hart: Thank you.
- Alison Monahan: So, when you think about animal law, what is the spectrum is the stuff I guess that we're talking about here?
- Pamela Hart: Sure. Well I like to describe animal law as a combination of statutory and case law, in which we're really looking at the nature of non-human animals. And animal law really encompasses a wide variety of things, from companion animals to wildlife, animals used in entertainment, and animals raised for food and research. And what's really interesting about animal law is it truly does intersect what we like to think of as the traditional areas of the law, whether it's family law, constitutional law, criminal law.
- Alison Monahan: Intellectual property.
- Pamela Hart: Sure.
- Alison Monahan: I remember the one about the gorilla. Was it the gorilla that took the selfie and who owned the copyright?
- Pamela Hart: It was the monkey. Absolutely right. And that's what makes this area of the law so cutting edge is that theories are still being developed and precedent is still being set. So, it's really an exciting and absolutely challenging time for law students to consider incorporating animal law into their practice.
- Alison Monahan: And is this something that a lot of schools have classes in? Do any of them have clinics? How common is this?

Pamela Hart: Sure. I started at the Animal Legal Defense Fund about 13 years ago and at that time, there were only about 30 to 40 student animal legal defense fund chapters. And these are chapters that fulfill our mission with us to protect the lives and advance the interest of animals through the legal system. And over the decade plus years, we've gone from about 40 student chapters to over 200.

Alison Monahan: Oh, that's great.

Pamela Hart: So, we're really seeing this explosion on campuses across the country. And at that same time, when I started, there was I'd say about 20 animal law courses. Now there's over 150 animal law courses being offered at law schools across the country. So, there's been tremendous interest in this area and really, I don't see any signs of it stopping.

Alison Monahan: Right, well I can't imagine it would. So, it sounds like, 150 is most law schools have some sort of at least introductory class in animal law. Do you think that's accurate?

Pamela Hart: That is accurate. There's approximately 200 ABA accredited law schools in the country. So that 150 number, you're directly on point. Most of the time, it's an animal law survey type of course, but you'll see some law schools offering a really robust and comprehensive program. In fact, we're in collaboration with Lewis & Clark Law School and we've come together to form the Center for Animal Law Studies at Lewis & Clark. And they offer up to 30 different animal law courses throughout the year. So, we're seeing more schools really specialize in this area of the law.

Alison Monahan: Okay. And are there other schools that are kind of known for this besides Lewis & Clark that you could point to?

Pamela Hart: Absolutely. There is a relatively new animal law program at Harvard Law School. They have some fellows working over there it's being head up by Chris Green, who is a former colleague of mine. And we're seeing a lot of really great work coming out of Harvard Law School. Also, MSU has an animal law program. So, we're seeing more of these universities starting to develop and offer more things to the students.

Alison Monahan: Great. And if this is something, people are listening to this and they're like, "Oh, that sounds kind of cool. I like my rescue puppy." How would you suggest someone get started? Are there things they can do in law school? It sounds like there are organizations they can participate in, possible classes. If someone came to you and they're thinking about law school and they're like, "I kind of think I want to do animal law," what would you suggest to them?

Pamela Hart: That's a great question. And thankfully there are a lot of opportunities for law students. I've referenced our Student Animal Legal Defense Fund chapters, so that's always my starting point. If there's a student chapter at your law school,

join it, get involved, meet like-minded individuals. If there isn't a Student Legal Defense Fund chapter, start one. It's a great way to make your mark on campus, it's a great way to leave your legacy. I always recommend to if your law school doesn't offer an animal law course, meet with the administration and petition to have one added. You'd be surprised how receptive administrations can be when a student body wants to add a particular subject to the curriculum. I always suggest starting a petition and circulating it with the student body to see if they would be interested and support the addition of this type of course.

I also think it's always a great idea to do some coalition building. So, if you're a member of this Student Animal Legal Defense Fund chapter, reach out to other chapters or societies. For example, you could partner with the Women's Law Society and put together a joint even on the link between domestic violence and animal cruelty.

Alison Monahan: That's a great idea. I think, as you said, there's all these different sort of aspects of animal law. So, I could see a really interesting symposium or discussion about the IP issues and that kind of thing. Yeah, I think the idea of bringing in other people and making that a perspective sounds really fascinating, actually.

Pamela Hart: And we're seeing more and more that happen, particularly with environmental law and animal law. There's so many issues related to confined animal factory operations, factory farming, as well as climate change discussions, so we're seeing a lot more of our students collaborate and joining forces with environmental law students as well.

Alison Monahan: I'd have to imagine there's also a lot of crossover with administrative law. I know for example in California, we voted on a ballot measure for humane farming of chickens, I think it was. So, somebody's got to write all of that legislation and that kind of thing. It sounds like this is an area that brings a lot of different stuff together. Is there any type of person you think this is a good fit for? Like different characteristics or skills they would need?

Pamela Hart: Sure. And I think the bottom line is that we are always looking for really good lawyers. So, the best piece of advice I would give is to get a great legal education. You definitely have to be the type of person who is comfortable with writing, speaking, listening, advocating, being tenacious, and being patient. Because unfortunately, the legal system can take a long time to come to any sort of victories or positive results for animals. And oftentimes there's more disappoints and setbacks than victories. So, it's really just sticking with the process and not giving up.

The flip side of that, working in animal protection, really gives certain type of individual the opportunity to marry their passion with their profession and really be their dream job and affect change for animals.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that sounds great. Other than sort of a straight public interest organization, like yours, what other areas might people find themselves working in?

Pamela Hart: Well, I think that, like you said, you can work for a non-profit whether it's the Animal Legal Defense Fund, HSUS, PETA, ASPCA. You can also start your own practice, be a solo practitioner or join other individuals and have a practice full time. We're seeing a lot of students, particularly these days, just do to the demand of the jobs. Or, you know, not quite as many full-time animal positions and as we'd all like, going in to work for a large law firm and carving out a portion of their pro bono time and dedicating it to animal protection organizations. In fact, we have over 2,000 attorneys and law firms who donate their time to us and really find meaning doing animal law work with the Animal Legal Defense.

Alison Monahan: I definitely want to return to that latter, but there's something else you said that I want to get a little more information about. So, you mentioned that people could think about starting a solo practice doing animal law. What would that look like? What type of work would they be doing?

Pamela Hart: And that is the challenge, right? Because-

Alison Monahan: I mean, I'm envisioning pet wills? What would be the-

Pamela Hart: Absolutely. Because you have to think a little bit creatively here because as we know, animals don't have any money that they can pay the attorneys with so you're absolutely right. It's working with a particular client who may want to add their companion animal to estate planning. It may be a custody dispute between family members. Unfortunately, companion animals are considered property under the law. So that brings in a whole lot of different legal issues from a property law perspective. We will see attorneys who represent clients or defend clients where there may be a bit issue or some sort of complaint against a very clinic or so on and so forth. So, it's more of those day today claims.

Alison Monahan: Right, interesting. That's totally fascinating. And then give me a little more information, what do you actually do on a day to day basis? You've been at your organization you said I think 13 years? What does a career look like at that point?

Pamela Hart: Well, I think the career can look quite differently even within Animal Legal Defense Fund, depending on what you decide to specialize in. We have our litigation program that works 30,000 feet up specializing in high impact litigation. We also have our criminal justice program that works closely with district attorneys and ADA offices to help and assist them with criminal cases. And then the animal law program, and that's the program that I head up, works really closely with law students and law school administrations who want to incorporate animal law either into the school process or incorporate it in

working with our pro bono attorneys. I always like to say that I work in the happy part of the organization and the movement because I get to work with the law students the attorneys who really want to leverage their talents and expertise to advocate for animals.

Alison Monahan: Okay. So, you're essentially almost like an education branch where you're training the next generation possibly of animal rights lawyers.

Pamela Hart: Absolutely. We do the outreach and we do the education and we provide support and the resources to exactly write, foster, and facilitate the next generation of animal lawyers. We are fortunate enough to be able to provide clerkship opportunities, fellowship opportunities. We provide travel grants to law students interested in going to conferences, project grants, scholarships. So, we're really able to connect with these law students and support them in really powerful ways while they're in school.

Alison Monahan: This all sounds great. If someone is listening to this and they want more information, where can they find that?

Pamela Hart: Well, first of all I would go to Animal Legal Defense Fund, our website is ladf.org, and if law students or anyone is interested in connecting immediately with this type of audience, we are co-hosting a conference, it's our 25th annual animal law conference taking place in October, the weekend of the 13th through the 15th in Portland, Oregon and it's going to be a great opportunity to meet the best and brightest experts in the field and it's a three day agenda focusing on animal protection issues.

Alison Monahan: Is that an annual event?

Pamela Hart: It's an annual event and I always like to tell students who want to get involved in this area of the law that one of the best things you can do is network, get out there, meet other students, meet the leaders in the field, and then see if you can work for them while you're in law school or do some pro bono work.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that sounds amazing. I would highly recommend that anyone who's listening to this who's interested in the area try to do anything they can to get themselves to that conference. Oftentimes the schools also will provide travel money. So, there's really no excuse, you should be there.

Pamela Hart: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: Let's talk a little more generally now about [public interest](#) work. Was this something that you knew you were dedicated to when you went to law school? It sounds like you were.

Pamela Hart: You know, when I did start law school I knew this is what I wanted to focus on. It wasn't quite clear to me how I was going to get there. And fortunately for me,

when I was a one L, I took a public interest course. My professor was very supportive, and that non-profit that I had shared with you at the beginning of the show, we went to this professor and asked if we could start a non-profit for two credits in our public interest course.

Alison Monahan: Nice.

Pamela Hart: And she was very supportive. So, I think it plays a gigantic role. When I was in law school there was not an animal law course, there was not a chapter. So, I made most of my contacts through the public interest path.

Alison Monahan: And how would you suggest students start preparing themselves? I think a lot of people kind of go ... I guess there are two branches that I saw, at least, of public interest people. There are the people who are totally dedicated, this is what they're going to do, they have a plan, they're on the path. Then there are these people who are like sort of, "Well, I'd kind of like to do this, but I'm not really sure how to get started." What should people do?

Pamela Hart: Well, I think if you know this is an area that you want to focus on, you absolutely, just like with animal protection or anything that you're interested in, should get involved, get connected, network, start to take classes that are on point. But at a higher level, I think with any area of the law that you want to practice, it comes back to, again, getting the best education that you can, being well versed in multiple areas, because as we see with animal law, it really does intersect with all areas of the law.

Alison Monahan: And what would you say, what advice would you give to someone who comes to you and they say, "Well, I've been admitted to a really prestigious great school, but they don't really have, maybe they have one intro class but that's it. I've also been admitted to a school that has a really dedicated, like Lewis & Clark or something, a really dedicated program." How does somebody start to weigh that? What would you suggest they think about?

Pamela Hart: That is the million-dollar question and I think I can give you my personal perspective, but I don't think there's a right or wrong answer to this. I think because it is such a competitive environment, it serves a law student well to get the best, well-rounded education that you can possibly get and expose yourself to learning opportunities and, again, networking opportunities, and practical experience while you're in law school, working for one of the animal protection organizations.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, I think generally I'd probably give the same advice and then also say, well, also look at the money, you know?

Pamela Hart: Well that's a very good point. And what a loan forgiveness program may or may not be looking like, because that unfortunately, is a reality for a lot of people.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely.

Pamela Hart: It limits the type of job that you can take if you're concerned about how large your loan may be when you graduate.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think the key message here is just there are a lot of factors, no one can give you a solid answer to that question. It's all about what you value, what your financial resources are or aren't, what kind of lifestyle you're going to plan to live after law school. I think anybody's ... You have to think very carefully about all these choices you're making.

Pamela Hart: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: Okay, so assuming I'm not able to jump full time into a [public interest career](#), I've got to pay my loans back, tell me a little bit more about pro bono opportunities. Do you think these could end up leading to a career?

Pamela Hart: I absolutely think they can end up leading to a career. In fact, that's how I got my job when I first started in the movement. The first thing I did when I graduated from law school is I applied for the Animal Legal Defense Fund's attorney volunteer program. And almost immediately I got a call for help in my state, which I was very excited about, and that was a great opportunity for me to get to know some people on the inside of the organization.

Alison Monahan: And what type of work were you doing?

Pamela Hart: I was in private practice, so I was-

Alison Monahan: No, I mean the pro bono work. What type of project are these?

Pamela Hart: Oh, it's a wide variety of things that you can work on. It can be from litigation to legal research and writing. It can be guides for non-attorneys who want to do more in animal law. It can be even helping our general counsel or doing work on our website. My specific request at that time was to volunteer my hours to help with some hunting issues in my state. So, I was able to do that and it connected me with C Wells who is now our Executive Director of the Animal Legal Defense Fund. So, when a job opening came up, he already knew who I was. So, I would say for anyone who doesn't get what they're considering their dream job right out of law school, is to still connect with the organization that you would like to work for.

Alison Monahan: I think that's great advice. When I was thinking about leaving the firm, I considered starting a family practice. And really the first thing I did was I went to the Bar Association in San Francisco and I took on a pro bono project doing a pro bono divorce case because I figured, well, at least then I'll get a mentor. And it turned out they literally gave me a list of 30 pages of family lawyers who were willing to help me in San Francisco, which, I mean, what an amazing resource.

Pamela Hart: For sure. And that's a great point. Anyone who's interested in this area of law, connect with your local experts and find a great mentor. That's wonderful advice. And there are animal law committees and various animal law sections of the ABA that you can look into and join.

Alison Monahan: True, exactly. I think it definitely seems to be a burgeoning area with probably more and more stuff every time you look around, I would imagine.

Pamela Hart: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: All right. So, if somebody wants to get involved in pro bono work in this area, can they do that directly through the LADF or do you work more with law firms? How does that work?

Pamela Hart: Absolutely. They can reach out to the Animal Legal Defense Fund. Our pro bono program is always looking for people who are interested in this area of the law and we welcome anyone who's interested, whether it's a solo practitioner on up to a large law firm. Again, it really gives people a meaningful opportunity to practice animal law.

Alison Monahan: I mean, that sounds great. I think it would be a really amazing area to get involved in. Where do you see this going in the future? Where do you see it evolving? Are there specific areas that you think are becoming more and more interesting or more and more active?

Pamela Hart: Well, you know, one of our primary focus is really definitely on factory farmed animals because so many billions of animals are affected by this issue. So, this will be an area that we continue to focus on and I see it continuing to be a number one priority as long as animals are confined in these animal factories.

We're also seeing more and more interest in animals in entertainment. It seems to be we're almost somewhat of a tipping point. We've seen the reaction with people with Sea World after watching Blackfish and the Wrigley Brothers have shut down and Universal has stopped using orangutans in their shows. So, we've really seen animals in entertainment at a place in time hopefully within our life time, we'll see a tremendous shift in that area.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I remember hearing the circus was going to shut down. I was like, oh wow, that's super interesting. I remember going with a kid and you were like watching these elephants and thinking like, "Oh, is that very nice for them? I don't know."

Pamela Hart: Right. And it goes back to the having more defeats than victories and that's definitely one of those victories that okay, great, fantastic, we can keep moving forward.

Alison Monahan: And how do you handle that? If you're playing the long game here and you are going to see probably a lot of defeats before you get your victory. How do you handle that emotionally?

Pamela Hart: Well, I think it's having a great support system in your colleagues. And also focusing on the victories. But for me personally, working with law students, it's fantastic to see the next generation of animal attorneys and seeing their talent and dedication. It really is inspiring and gives a lot of hope of what's to come as it emerges more and more

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's great. I would imagine it is motivating to work ... that's one of the reasons we like working with law students: they're still optimistic.

Pamela Hart: Right, exactly.

Alison Monahan: Like oh, you're so refreshing.

Pamela Hart: Right.

Alison Monahan: All right, we're almost out of time here, but do you have any final advice for law students or young lawyers who are specifically interested in animal law or maybe public interest or advocacy work more generally?

Pamela Hart: Sure, sure. I would say the best piece of advice I can give is really to pick the area that you're most interested in, pick your passion, create your own opportunities, network, surround yourself with like-minded individuals, and while there may be a lot of challenges right now in the animal protection movement, there's a lot of really exciting opportunities. And I think that this is one of those unique moments in time where they have the opportunity to be involved in a great social justice movement. That's very important. And they are in a position to make a meaningful difference and a positive change for animals. So, I would encourage any law students who are interested in this area of the ale definitely explore it further.

Alison Monahan: Okay, and how can they do that? Where can they find you on the internet, social media, that type of thing.

Pamela Hart: Absolutely. Please visit ladf.org.

Alison Monahan: Well, thank you Pamela, this was really fascinating and I think you've provided some absolutely fantastic resources for people. We really appreciate you taking the time out of your schedule, I know you have a lot to do, to come and talk to you.

Pamela Hart: Thank you very much Alison and thank you for having me on your show.

Alison Monahan: Definitely my pleasure. With that, we are out of time. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox Podcast, please take a second to [leave a review or rating](#) on iTunes or your favorite app because we would really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything.

Typically, our new episodes are out on Monday. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or Alison at Lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or Alison@lawschooltoolbox.com. Or you can always contact us via our [website contact form at lawschooltoolbox.com](#). Thanks for listening and we'll talk soon.

Resources:

- [Sheltering Animals of Abuse Victims](#)
- [What's Your Alternative? Uncovering Alternative Career Paths for the Law Firm Skeptic - How Do I Become a Public Interest Attorney?](#)
- [Podcast Episode 101: Preparing for a Career in Public Interest Law \(with Ashley Matthews of Equal Justice Works\)](#)