



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Union, SC

On October 12th, 2025, Jada Rogers and Cassidi Hyatt were arrested and charged by the Union County Sheriff's Office with Cruelty to Animals, a five-year felony, for intentionally setting fire to a live dog. The nature of the allegations, naturally, provoked considerable public outrage. I instructed the staff in my Union office to obtain the case file and share it with me as soon as possible in anticipation of a potential bond hearing and media inquiries.

The files we received contained little information and appeared to be based primarily on second-hand accounts of the incident. My staff requested additional information and after some time, we received a bit more but there were still many unanswered questions. What we had learned raised concerns about the validity of the charges, so I instructed my investigator at the Union County Solicitor's Office to conduct his own inquiry into the matter. What we learned through our investigation and interviews is detailed below.

Jada Rogers and Cassidi Hyatt had a dog named Red that became sick in the first week of October 2025. On October 8 they took Red to a Veterinarian in Union because it was clear the dog was very sick, and a neighbor believed Red might have Parvo. The vet confirmed this and said without treatment Red would die. They could not afford the medicine, so they applied for help through an assistance program and were denied financial assistance. Jada and Cassidi could not afford to leave Red to be treated "inpatient", so they followed the advice of the vet and sought the recommended treatment supplies to treat Red at home, borrowing money from family to pay for it.

Despite the medicine they obtained for Red he did not improve and on October 10 he appeared to die. Jada and Cassidi attempted to dig a grave for Red, but the ground was too hard. They sought help from neighbors but ultimately decided to cremate Red. The neighbor who saw Red, limp in Jada's arms, also believed Red to be dead. Cassidi left their home before Jada carried out the cremation and was not present for any of it.

No one saw the start of the cremation except Jada. One neighbor came out some time after the fire started and saw some movement in the fire but believed it to be muscles contracting in the heat, not a dog being burned alive.

Based on an examination of Red's body by the same Veterinarian who treated him earlier it is clear that Red had some life when he was burned because there was soot in his lungs. This Veterinarian stated that to an untrained person, a dog in the end stage of Parvo could certainly appear to be dead and the possibility of a mistake was real.

The video of Jada's arrest as well as calls she made from the jail showed she was clearly distressed at the idea she would have intentionally burned her dog alive. She protested vigorously that Red was dead when she burned him and it appears she sincerely believed that. Unfortunately, neither Jada nor Cassidi were interviewed by any Union County Sheriff's Office investigators before being charged and the deputy, who had no knowledge of the case, sent to arrest them could only promise them that he would share their concerns with the investigator on the case.

It is not unlawful to burn a dead dog and indeed, that is the recommended disposal method for a dog that dies from Parvo because the virus can survive for many months in the ground and could infect any other dog that digs up the body or came into contact with the dirt around the body.

To commit a crime a person must know that what they are doing is unlawful and do it anyway. They must intend to do the act that they know is wrong. A person who does an act under a mistaken belief of fact (e.g., believing the dog to be dead) cannot be acting with criminal intent. Mistakes of fact have been recognized as a defense since the beginning of time. *Genesis* 20:1-11. It is a valid defense under South Carolina law.

It is clear to me that these women truly believed that Red had died. It is also clear that they loved Red and went to great lengths to try and help him, even borrowing money to pay for medicine to administer at home. I do not believe that Jada would have burned Red if she had the slightest notion that he was still alive. Fortunately, it is unlikely that a dog in a comatose state, in the end stages of Parvo, would have felt pain due to the breakdown of its central nervous system.

Based on my investigation I will be entering dismissals on the charges of Animal Cruelty filed against Jada Rogers and Cassidi Hyatt. Jada mistakenly believed Red had died and Cassidi was neither present for nor a participant in, the attempted cremation.

Due to these charges, Cassidi Hyatt spent 18 days in the Union County jail and Jada Rogers spent 23 days. Additionally, this case stoked a substantial amount of outrage and caused these two women to be subjected to a great deal of scorn and criticism. I was not involved in the decision to charge them but as the elected prosecutor I feel compelled to apologize to them for what they have endured. Not only did they lose their beloved pet after doing all they could to save it, but they were also jailed for weeks and convicted of torturing Red in the court of public opinion.

I am sorry for what they have gone through. They were entitled to be considered innocent until proven guilty and that did not happen. We should strive to do better.