



Thursday, May 22, 2008

Letter

Banning dog breeds won't protect people

The May 15 article "Bully breeds of dogs face end to adoptions" was distressing. The implication that one breed of dog is more dangerous than another over-simplifies a complicated issue. It is necessary to gather the facts and find solutions to ensure the safety of communities in regard to living in close proximity with animals.

Eliminating adoptions of a certain breed sounds like an easy fix, but the factors that lead a dog to bite are not addressed with this tactic. A dog's tendency to bite depends on six interacting factors: heredity, early experience, socialization and training, physical and behavioral health, victim behavior and environment. Breed bans are unlikely to protect a community's citizens. They are based on statistics that are at best flawed due to difficulties in breed identification, poor collection of data and no consideration of breed popularity.

Instead, I recommend the following strategies to prevent dog bite injuries: Enforce Michigan's dangerous dog law with an emphasis on chronically irresponsible owners. Enforce existing leash laws. Encourage neutering. Educate the public about selecting a pet, pet care and responsibility, and bite prevention.

The association is collaborating on state legislation that would address dangerous dogs. Partners in this effort include the Animal Law Section of the Michigan Bar, the Michigan Humane Society and representatives from the Michigan Legislature and Livingston County. Discussions to date have avoided breed-specific legislation.

Livingston County officials shouldn't eliminate adoptions of certain breeds. Enforcement of existing law is a step toward a solution. Animals confined to their own property or on a leash rarely make headlines.

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