



**THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB**

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY**

**SUBMITTED BY**

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**COORDINATOR**

**THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB**

**FOR THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME AND**

**CORRECTIONS HEARING**

**OCTOBER 3, 1996**

**TOPIC: OWNERSHIP AND LICENSING OF DANGEROUS  
DOGS**

Representative Birmelin, members of the Subcommittee on Crime and Corrections, thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of the American Kennel Club regarding the ownership and licensing of dangerous dogs. My name is Jennifer King, and I am the Canine Legislation Coordinator for the American Kennel Club (AKC). The AKC was established in 1884 to promote the study, breeding, exhibiting, and advancement of purebred dogs. The AKC is the largest non profit purebred dog registry in the United States representing more than 4,500 dog clubs nationwide, including nearly 250 in Pennsylvania.

The AKC also sets the rules and regulations for the 13,000 dog events around the country each year, including conformation dog shows, obedience, agility, herding and field trial competitions and lure coursing. More than 1.7 million dogs and their owners participate in these and other AKC events yearly, giving spectators and entrants alike the chance to appreciate the abilities and benefits of healthy and well-trained purebred dogs.

The AKC's Canine Legislation department monitors and provides input for legislation governing responsible dog ownership. This involves assisting legislatures on many issues including dangerous dogs. The AKC supports reasonable, enforceable and non-discriminatory laws to control vicious dogs. Such laws better serve the public because they control all

dangerous dogs, not just those of specific breed or type. AKC has assisted in the passage of 11 of the 12 most recent non breed-specific state dangerous dog laws and has provided assistance to clubs working on more than 500 local dangerous dog ordinances. In fact, AKC assisted in the passage of the original dangerous dog amendment to Pennsylvania's 1982 Dog Law. The AKC uses Pennsylvania's 1990 dangerous dog amendment as an example of a reasonable and enforceable dog law. The 1990 amendment was a positive influence on the passage of four other similar state laws.

As you already know, from time to time laws need to be revised and improved in order to continue to be effective. Unfortunately, some laws are hastily drafted and passed in order to appease an immediate situation while ignoring the larger problem. For instance, when reacting to an attack by a "pit bull" on an innocent citizen, legislation may be drafted to ban all "pit bulls" in order to prevent another "pit bull" attack from reoccurring. Unfortunately, banning or placing special licensing requirements on specifically "pit bulls" will not solve this problem. Instead, it prevents animal control officers from being effective, pet therapy providers from performing therapy and responsible dog owners from enjoying companionship.

In order to prevent dangerous dog attacks the focus must be placed on the actions of the individual owner and the individual dog. Therefore, leash

laws must be strictly enforced, animal fighting laws must be strictly enforced and owners must be accountable for the actions of their dog regardless of the type or breed.

Poor legislation caused by one incident often unfairly targets one specific breed, as well as responsible animal owners. Forcing people who own a specific type of dog to comply with harsh regulations regardless of the behavior of their dog will prevent many people from licensing their pet. If faced with a special licensing fee and obtaining required liability insurance, both which may be cost prohibitive, many people may choose not to license their dog. Not only does special licensing put limits on owners, but on animal control officers as well, requiring them to focus on specific breeds instead of the actions of an individual dangerous dog.

Uniform legislation across the state is also extremely important in order to prevent mass confusion among animal control officers and dog owners. When municipalities are allowed to regulate dangerous dogs solely on the basis of breed or type instead of a fair law based on every dog's actions, poor animal control practices are encouraged.

Discriminatory laws affect the responsible owners and the people who use targeted breeds as therapy dogs. Such laws prevent these owners from

having a family friend or a therapeutic companion. Breed-specific laws do not prevent dog attacks or animal fighting. Stricter enforcement of current leash laws and animal fighting laws will accomplish those ends, better protect the people of Pennsylvania and ensure their safety from all dangerous animals.