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Breed bans ineffective Best Friends Animal Society offers Massachusetts better solutions to dangerous dog issue

KANAB, UT (05/10/07) – Best Friends Animal Society is urging Massachusetts' officials to avoid wholesale banning of pit bull-type dogs, which is not effective in keeping communities safe.

This national animal welfare organization recently helped a city in southern Utah adopt an ordinance which focuses on managing potentially dangerous dogs regardless of breed. Best Friends hopes Massachusetts lawmakers also will address the core issue rather than settling for banning a breed stereotype.

On Monday, May 14, the Massachusetts Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government will hold a hearing on potential new dog-control laws.

In April of this year, with Best Friends' guidance, the city council in Cedar City, Utah, voted unanimously not to adopt a proposed ban on pit bulls. The ordinance the council adopted instead encourages owners to take responsibility for their dogs before an attack occurs.

"We are ready to provide whatever support the state of Massachusetts needs in order to not ban dogs just because they are of a bully-breed type. In many instances these dogs are loved family pets with no aggressive tendencies. Banning dogs just because of their breed is simply wrong," said Russ Mead, general counsel for Best Friends Animal Society

"Instead, we would like to offer the guidelines that Best Friends has developed as a preemptive approach to address the safety needs of the whole community. Dog attacks are a very serious health risk for any community, especially with children," Mead said.

According to Best Friends Animal Society, dog bites or attacks typically occur not because of the breed, but because of irresponsible, cruel or criminal owners.

"The attacking dog may not have been spayed or neutered, socialized or trained properly. The dog may have been abused, chained, neglected, isolated, or trained specifically for fighting," Mead said.

Best Friends' model proposal includes the following:

1. Dangerous dog laws that recognize levels of aggressive behavior and impose requirements on owners for managing dogs depending on the level of aggression. (This is a new approach that requires owners to manage and control their dogs *before* someone is seriously hurt.)

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2. Strictly enforced leash or at-large laws--82% of all dog bites occur when dogs are off leash or not confined in some way.
3. Better access to low-cost spay/neuter programs--90% of fatal dog attacks are by dogs that are not spayed or neutered.
4. Education about the importance of socializing and training dogs, managing dogs--particularly around children--and making dogs part of the family.
5. Laws that restrict the tethering, chaining, penning or caging of dogs--dogs that are chained are 2.8 times more likely to be aggressive.
6. Stronger enforcement of animal cruelty laws and tougher dog-fighting laws, including bans on breeding and training dogs for aggression.

For more information about Best Friends Animal Society and about how you can protect your community from dog attacks, please visit www.network.bestfriends.org/stopbs/.

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About Best Friends Animal Society

Located on 33,000 acres in Kanab, Utah, Best Friends Animal Society operates the country's largest sanctuary for homeless animals and is home, on any given day, to about 1,500 dogs, cats, horses, rabbits, birds and other animals. Best Friends works globally with animal shelters and rescue groups to bring about a time when there will be no more homeless pets. Best Friends advances initiatives nationwide that promote community approaches to make the world a better place through kindness to animals, including adoption, spay/neuter, and humane education programs.

"Kindness to animals builds a better world for all of us."