

# The American Sporting Dog Alliance

*The Unified Voice of Sporting Dog Owners Nationwide*

## **Animal Rights Groups Lie To Chicago Aldermen**

### ***‘Cook’ Statistics To Push For Spay And Neuter Mandate***

by JOHN YATES

American Sporting Dog Alliance

<http://www.americansportingdogalliance.org>

CHICAGO, IL – (May 19 2008) Animal rights activists have hand-fed Chicago aldermen a variety of disinformation, distortions and outright lies in order to justify an ordinance mandating the sterilization of dogs and cats. The ordinance was introduced this week.

Ordinance sponsors, Aldermen Ginger Rugai (19th) and Edward M. Burke (14th), say that their goal is to prevent attacks by roving packs of dogs, and to reduce what they term an overpopulation of pets that jam the city’s shelter system.

We don’t doubt the sincerity of Rugai and Burke. They simply are echoing what they have been told by animal rights activists closely tied to the radical Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). HSUS is not an organization to help animals. It is a powerful national political action group to advance the animal rights agenda. Their ultimate goal is the elimination of animal ownership in America.

The ordinance would require all dogs and cats to be spayed or neutered at the age of six months. Fines for violations start at \$100, and go up to \$500 if an animal is not sterilized within 60 days of the initial citation.

There are some possible exemptions from this requirement, providing a dog’s owner is willing to pay a \$330 annual license fee, have her or his home classified as a licensed “animal care facility,” and be subject to inspections and criminal background checks for him/herself and every member of the dog owner’s family. Even business associates would be subject to these requirements if they have contact with the dogs.

Possible exemptions to mandatory sterilization are granted, at the discretion of the city, for holders of breeding permits, registered purebreds that are actively being shown or entered in competition, dogs that are currently being trained for competition, service dogs, dogs owned by an agency that provides guard dogs, police dogs, military dogs or dogs that have certified medical reasons that would preclude sterilization.

The American Veterinary Medical Association estimates that 37-percent of American households own dogs, with an average of 1.7 dogs per household. For Chicago’s population of 1.1 million households, that would translate into 392,913 households that own 667,952 dogs.

Nationwide, about 60-percent of the dogs already are spayed and neutered. Based on that figure, Chicago’s enforcement problem would require regulating about 267,000 unsterilized dogs – a daunting task for a city that is perpetually strapped for money.

Rugai has attempted to introduce pet sterilization legislation before, but the proposed ordinances have died in committee. This time, however, she is joined by Burke, who as chairman of the Finance Committee is one of the most powerful members of Council.

The next Council meeting will be Wednesday, June 11, 2008 at 10:00 a.m.

## **Dangerous Dog Attacks**

The major reason for the ordinance, as stated by Aldermen Rugai and Burke, is the danger of people being attacked by roving packs of dogs. They cite a frightening April 10 incident when Southwest Side resident Gabriela Munoz Lopez was attacked by five “pit bulls.” She sustained severe bites before being rescued by a passer-by, who pulled her into his van.

The aldermen said the ordinance is justified, because intact dogs are 2.6 times more likely to bite than sterilized dogs. They allege that the city is full of roving packs of dangerous dogs, although actual statistics contradict these assertions.

In 1978, Chicago reported 11,932 cases of dog bites. By 2007, according to Chicago Animal Care & Control, the number of reported dog bites had fallen to 2,149. That is an 82-percent decline.

While 2,149 dog bite cases is a significant number, further analysis of the data shows that there are far fewer severe bites.

In 1979, 199 children were treated for dog bites at Chicago’s former Wyler Children's Hospital, and 11 were admitted. In 2007, 17 children were treated at Chicago’s Comer Children's Hospital (the former Wyler facility), of which two were admitted. That is a 91-percent decline in treatment, and an 88-percent decline in hospitalization.

These statistics reflect dog bites of any kind, and do not indicate that people were bitten by roaming packs of dogs, as the aldermen and their HSUS sources claim.

A local organization called Pets Are Worth Saving (PAWS) has been pushing the issue of dog attacks on its website and in news releases. PAWS founder and Chairperson Paula Fasseas has very close ties to the radical Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), and has acted as a spokesperson for the aldermen in newspaper reports of this issue. In fact, Fasseas has judged awards given to animal rights activists by HSUS.

The PAWS material is virtually a carbon copy of HSUS position papers and jargon, and the two aldermen echo the same words and ideas in the preamble to the ordinance.

“Pit bulls,” a generic term for several breeds of dogs and their crosses, repeatedly crop up in the discussion. The aldermen link them to street crime, the drug culture and gangs, and animal rights groups tie them to dog attacks and dog fighting.

However, the “pit bull” breeds and crosses represent only six-percent of the dogs in America, studies have shown. This means that an effort by City Council to stop the breeding of “pit bulls” will harm the 94-percent of Chicagoans who do not own those breeds of dogs.

Good laws go after the bad guys. Bad laws go after everyone, in the hope of catching some bad guys.

An AKC ranking of the most popular breeds of dogs puts mastiffs in 36<sup>th</sup> place, bullmastiffs in 46<sup>th</sup> place, bull terriers in 53<sup>rd</sup> place, American Staffordshire terriers in 70<sup>th</sup> place, and Staffordshire bull terriers in 79<sup>th</sup> place. These are the breeds commonly called “pit bulls.”

In the past, Fasseas and Rugai have ignored the position of the Chicago Veterinary Medicine Association (CVMA), with more than 1,000 member veterinarians, by their advocacy of breed-specific legislation, which would outlaw “pit bull” breeds and crosses.

A 2005 letter by former CVMA President Dr. Joanne Carlson DVM strongly opposed a ban on “pit bulls.” types: “Forcing responsible pet owners to surrender well-behaved dogs is both unfair and unnecessary. The CVMA strongly supports enforcing leash laws, vaccination requirements and the implementation of programs to teach responsible dog ownership. In addition, we advocate setting clear guidelines to manage dangerous dogs on an individual basis.”

## ‘Pet Overpopulation’ Myth

Aldermen Rugai and Burke also said the ordinance was based on high admission and euthanasia rates at the city shelter, and a high population of unwanted surplus pets. The aldermen and PAWS point out that 22,833 dogs and cats were euthanized at the shelter in 2006 (the latest available data).

According to Burke, Rugai and PAWS, a mandatory spay and neuter ordinance will solve this problem.

The facts say otherwise.

Official reports from the shelter show that the number of pets euthanized at the shelter has fallen dramatically, from 42,561 in 1996 to 19,701 in 2006. That is a 54-percent decline over 10 years.

The decline continues at a rapid pace. In 2006, the Chicago Animal Shelter Alliance reported a 12-percent drop in euthanasia and an 11-percent drop in shelter admissions between 2003 and 2005. Moreover, the Alliance reported, euthanasia rates per thousand residents placed Chicago second only to Denver for the lowest kill numbers between the two coasts.

But that is not even half the story.

An analysis of the shelter data for 2006 shows that only 736 healthy dogs were euthanized, and this figure includes dogs that were brought to the shelters by their owners specifically to be euthanized.

The vast majority of the dogs euthanized were categorized as unhealthy and untreatable; 7,220 killed dogs fit this category, and 1,195 of that total were brought by their owners to be euthanized.

A breakdown of the 736 healthy dogs that were killed is not available, but many other shelters report that these dogs tend to have temperament problems, or be among the “pit bull” breeds and crosses. Many shelters automatically put “pit bulls” on death row.

Those figures also tell only part of the story. The other major factor is a breakdown of admissions and discharges (where the dogs come from and where they go).

Of the 19,544 dogs entering the shelter, 16,668 came from “the public,” which combines voluntary relinquishments and dogs picked up by animal control officers.

The total includes 1,012 dogs brought to the city shelter from rescue groups and private shelters belonging to the Community Coalition, 649 dogs brought by rescue groups and private shelters not belonging to the Coalition, and 1,195 untreatable and ill dogs brought by their owners to be euthanized.

Of those admissions, 1,118 dogs were returned to their owners, 5,088 dogs were adopted from the city shelter, 1,126 dogs were transferred to private shelters and rescue groups that belong to the Coalition, and 1,762 dogs were transferred to private shelters and rescue groups that do not belong to the Coalition.

The pattern is clear. Private shelters and rescue groups that tout their no-kill status take their elderly, sick, injured and undesirable dogs to the city shelter to be put to death. They return to their private groups with 2,888 dogs that are easily adopted. These dogs tend to include popular breeds, small dogs, and “cute, cuddly” dogs.

The city shelter does the dirty work and deals with the cast-offs. The independent groups take the cream and are able to claim no-kill status for public relations purposes.

Now, some of those same organizations cynically want private dog owners to pay the price for their statistical manipulations, through a burdensome, unfair and draconian spay and neuter mandate.

In truth, the statistics show clearly and conclusively, there were only 736 healthy dogs euthanized at the city shelter in 2006, and most of those probably were elderly, of unpopular or “undesirable” breeds, or fitting the description of the hardest dogs to place: “big, black dogs.”

The myth of pet “overpopulation” in Chicago is further exploded by the fact that thousands of adoptable dogs are imported into the city every year by private shelters and rescue groups to meet the insatiable demand for adoptable pets in the metropolitan area. These dogs are trucked in from other states by the dozens, and many are flown in from foreign countries such as Mexico, Korea, Taiwan and Puerto Rico. That assertion is clearly documented by reviewing the websites of “humane relocation” groups and their extensive transport network.

The PAWS shelter, whose director says there is an overpopulation of dogs in Chicago, also brings in many dogs from the southern states to be adopted. A year after Hurricane Katrina, PAWS reported bringing in dozens of dogs (three vans with 40 dogs on just one trip) to its state-of-the-art \$9 million new shelter that houses only 70 dogs and 80 cats. Pretty fancy digs! Complete with crystal chandeliers!

PAWS projected adopting 1,700 rescued dogs in 2007, but expected that this number would increase to 4,000 in 2008. “Rescuing” in America has become a big business.

## **Inherently Divisive**

Mandatory spay and neuter ordinances are inherently divisive. They pit law abiding and conscientious dog owners against elected officials in heated emotional battles. They divide people who love and own dogs from people who work in the rescue movement from the best of motives. They cultivate mistrust of animal control officials. They spark allegations of racism and racial profiling when “pit bulls” are singled out.

Moreover, these kinds of ordinances have been proven to backfire in communities that have tried them. They result in more abandoned dogs, higher shelter admissions, higher euthanasia rates, lower compliance with licensing and rabies vaccination laws, and radically increased municipal costs for animal control.

These kinds of ordinances and laws have failed in everywhere they have been tried. People are afraid to get dog licenses, as proof of sterilization is required. People are afraid to go to a veterinarian for rabies shots or medical care, because veterinarians are required to turn them in. Many dogs suffer as a result. People abandon their pets because they fear the fines and penalties. Children lose beloved companions because their parents won't abide by the law.

And what does it accomplish? Nothing. Nada. Zilch. That has been the experience of every community that has tried it. It set San Mateo County, CA, back 10 years, and the county still hasn't reached statewide averages.

Another lie fed to the aldermen was about a “comprehensive program” to spay and neuter pets in New Hampshire, which saved \$3.2 million in sheltering costs.

That’s true. The lie is that the New Hampshire program is voluntary – not mandatory, such as is being proposed in Chicago. Voluntary spaying and neutering works, and cities that have taken this seriously – such as San Francisco and Berkley, CA – have achieved 100-percent no-kill status at municipal shelters in only a year.

If San Francisco can do it right, why does Chicago want to do it wrong?

The reason why is simple: animal rights philosophy. The animal rights groups want to see people abandon their pets. They want to see high shelter admissions, and high euthanasia rates. They want to see dog owners hassled and harassed, and living in fear, so that they will give up their pets.

They want this because they believe all private ownership of animals is exploitation and slavery. One of the most radical groups, People For The Ethical Treatment of Animals, kills more than 94-percent of the dogs at its own shelter in Virginia every year. Some years, it’s 97-percent.

As HSUS President Wayne Pacelle said: “One generation and out.” Spay them, neuter them, and they’re gone in one generation.

That’s the plan that the animal rights groups are hiding from the aldermen.

Fasseas of PAWS added much fuel to the fire of divisiveness with her recently published comment about the ordinance: “This legislation will ensure that pet guardians bear the responsibility for adequately caring for their pets.” People who own dogs are not their guardians. They are their owners. The term “guardian” makes all animals wards of the state. They are not. Animals are private property, and we hope City Council has the courage to reaffirm this basic American right of property ownership. Mandatory spay and neuter ordinances make dogs into *de facto* wards of the state. That is their logic or, much more accurately, their illogic. These ordinances take away dog owners’ control of their property, arbitrarily take away their right to possess their property, and arbitrarily take away the value of their property. The City of Chicago does not own my dogs. I do. Divisiveness truly is inherent in these kinds of ordinances. While dogs may be legally private property, the fact is that most dog owners see them as family. They feel invaded and raped by these kinds of laws. It is wrong for government to make decent, law-abiding people feel this way. Many Black people also see the focus on “pit bulls” as inherently racist. “Pit bulls” are popular in many inner city areas for several reasons. They are fashionable. They are seen as guard dogs in high crime districts. They are sometimes a statement of a lack of faith in the police and justice system to protect people from criminals. Many of these breeds also are noted for being exceptionally loyal and devoted to their families. Yet, Aldermen Rugai and Burke see “pit bull” ownership as an indication of criminal activity: Dog fighting, drugs or gangs. Websites and blogs already are calling this Chicago ordinance a form of racial profiling and even overt racism, since the aldermen are really talking about Black and Hispanic neighborhoods. They are saying that the mere possession of a “pit bull” is a probable indicator of criminal behavior.

Burke was quoted in the *Chicago Sun-Times*. “When you drive down the street and see a gang banger with all kinds of gang regalia walking along with two or three pit bulls, it’s pretty simple for the policeman to raise the dog’s tail and see whether or not it’s spayed or neutered. If it’s not, the gang member is in violation,” Burke said, noting that street gangs operate dog-fighting rings. “...I don’t know of too many gang members [who] would be willing to subject themselves to this type of scrutiny (of background checks for unsterilized dogs).”

It is hard for some Black people not to see those kinds of comments as a subtle form of racism.

Divisiveness also will rear its head in the courts, through prosecution of law-abiding good citizens from every neighborhood of the city, and from expensive lawsuits against the city that are virtually guaranteed, if this ordinance is passed. Los Angeles is in the midst of this kind of lawsuit right now.

Another kind of divisiveness will chase away many of the loyal and dedicated volunteers who work with the city shelter and private rescue groups. When they see the increase in abandoned pets and euthanasia rates, they will know that all of their hard work and personal sacrifices have been for naught.

The grim black irony of this is that Chicago already has one of the very finest shelter programs and rescue networks in America. They have worked miracles, and this is not an exaggeration. Through their work, euthanasia and shelter admission rates have plummeted, and thousands of animals have found good and loving homes.

Their work will be destroyed by this ordinance.

The answer is not to divide people. It is to enforce existing laws. The dangerous situations, such as the recent dog attack, could be prevented simply by aggressive enforcement of existing leash laws and licensing requirements. The issue is not that these dogs may have puppies. The issue is that they are being allowed to roam in violation of existing laws.

## Medical Risks May Be Significant

The American Veterinary Medical Association has long advocated spaying and neutering of dogs and continues to do so, under the belief that the benefits outweigh the risks. However, recent research has led many individual veterinarians to seriously question this premise. The most recent research is pointing out many possible serious problems.

A 2007 analysis of the research by Dr. Larry Katz of Rutgers University concluded:

*“Tradition holds that the benefits of (sterilization) at an early age outweigh the risks. Often, tradition holds sway in the decision-making process even after countervailing evidence has accumulated. Ms (Laura) Sanborn has reviewed the veterinary medical literature in an exhaustive and scholarly treatise, attempting to unravel the complexities of the subject. More than 50 peer-reviewed papers were examined to assess the health impacts of spay / neuter in female and male dogs, respectively. One cannot ignore the findings of increased risk from osteosarcoma, hemangiosarcoma, hypothyroidism, and other less frequently occurring diseases associated with neutering male dogs. It would be irresponsible of the veterinary profession and the pet owning community to fail to weigh the relative costs and benefits of neutering on the animal’s health and well-being. The decision for females may be more complex, further emphasizing the need for individualized veterinary medical decisions, not standard operating procedures for all patients.”* Sanborn’s review of the research concluded: *The number of health problems associated with neutering may exceed the associated health benefits in most cases. On the positive side, neutering male dogs*

- *eliminates the small risk (probably <1%) of dying from testicular cancer*

- *reduces the risk of non-cancerous prostate disorders*
- *reduces the risk of perianal fistulas*
- *may possibly reduce the risk of diabetes (data inconclusive).* On the negative side, neutering male dogs

- *if done before 1 year of age, significantly increases the risk of osteosarcoma (bone cancer); this is a common cancer in medium/large and larger breeds with a poor prognosis.*
- *increases the risk of cardiac hemangiosarcoma by a factor of 1.6*
- *triples the risk of hypothyroidism*
- *increases the risk of progressive geriatric cognitive impairment*
- *triples the risk of obesity, a common health problem in dogs with many associated health problems*
- *quadruples the small risk (<0.6%) of prostate cancer*
- *doubles the small risk (<1%) of urinary tract cancers*
- *increases the risk of orthopedic disorders*

- *increases the risk of adverse reactions to vaccinations.*

*For female dogs, the situation is more complex. The number of health benefits associated with spaying may exceed the associated health problems in some (not all) cases. On balance, whether spaying improves the odds of overall good health or degrades them probably depends on the age of the female dog and the relative risk of various diseases in the different breeds. On the positive side, spaying female dogs*

- *if done before 2.5 years of age, greatly reduces the risk of mammary tumors, the most common malignant tumors in female dogs*
- *nearly eliminates the risk of pyometria, which otherwise would affect about 23% of intact female dogs; pyometria kills about 1% of intact female dogs*
- *reduces the risk of perianal fistulas*
- *removes the very small risk (<0.5%) from uterine, cervical, and ovarian tumors*

*On the negative side, spaying female dogs*

- *if done before 1 year of age, significantly increases the risk of osteosarcoma (bone cancer); this is a common cancer in larger breeds with a poor prognosis*
- *increases the risk of splenic hemangiosarcoma by a factor of 2.2 and cardiac hemangiosarcoma by a factor of >5; this is a common cancer and major cause of death in some breeds*
- *triples the risk of hypothyroidism*
- *increases the risk of obesity by a factor of 1.6-2, a common health problem in dogs with many associated health problems*
- *causes urinary “spay incontinence” in 4-20% of female dogs*
- *increases the risk of persistent or recurring urinary tract infections by a factor of 3-4*
- *increases the risk of recessed vulva, vaginal dermatitis, and vaginitis, especially for female dogs spayed before puberty*
- *doubles the small risk (<1%) of urinary tract tumors*
- *increases the risk of orthopedic disorders*
- *increases the risk of adverse reactions to vaccinations*

Sanborn concluded: “One thing is clear – much of the spay/neuter information that is available to the public is unbalanced and contains claims that are exaggerated or unsupported by evidence. Rather than helping to educate pet owners, much of it has contributed to common misunderstandings about the health risks and benefits.” It is ASDA’s opinion that these research findings cast enough doubt on the practice of universal sterilization to make it inadvisable if not reckless for any level of government to mandate spaying or neutering at this point in time. Moreover, such a mandate would expose any governing body to substantial legal and financial liability if individual pet owners successfully claim damages based on current or future research.

## **Please Help Chicago Dog Owners**

It is urgent for all dog owners to come to the assistance of Chicago people now. Please get involved by offering support, writing to the aldermen and Mayor Richard M. Daley, phoning and meeting with city officials, writing letters to the editor of local newspapers, and attending City Council meetings and work sessions.

To volunteer to help, please contact the following Chicago people who are working closely with the American Sporting Dog Alliance. They will help you to network with other local people. They are: Michele Smith ([msmith@cmscrescue.com](mailto:msmith@cmscrescue.com)); and Karen Perry ([ouilmette4@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ouilmette4@sbcglobal.net)).

We urge our readers to write to as many city aldermen as possible. It’s not an easy job, as there are 50 of them! This link will allow you to find each alderman’s email address, mailing address, phone number and fax number by clicking on each district:

<http://egov.cityofchicago.org/city/webportal/portalProgramAction.do?programId=536879154&channelId=-536879035&topChannelName=Government> .

The American Sporting Dog Alliance represents owners, hobby breeders and professionals who work with breeds of dogs that are used for hunting. We are a grassroots movement working to protect the rights of dog owners, and to assure that the traditional relationships between dogs and humans maintains its rightful place in American society and life. Please visit us on the web at <http://www.americansportingdogalliance.org>.

The American Sporting Dog Alliance also needs your help so that we can continue to work to protect the rights of dog owners. Your membership, participation and support are truly essential to the success of our mission. We are funded solely by the donations of our members, and maintain strict independence.

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