

Action Alert:

Illinois bill HB4213 would label 6 breeds as vicious

Hearing is January 18; please contact legislators below to tell them that breed-specific legislation will not prevent dangerous dog attacks.

Illinois law currently prohibits breed-specific legislation, but that common sense policy will change if HB 4213, a bill introduced by State Representative Michael Tryon, is approved by the full legislature. A hearing has been set for January 18 at 4 p.m. in Room D-1 Stratton Building, Springfield, Illinois. The bill can be read at <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/94/HB/PDF/09400HB4213lv.pdf>

HB4213 uses a one-two-three punch to pressure owners of these dogs regardless of the behavior of their pets: it removes the ban on breed-specific laws, lists four breeds and two types of dogs that are presumed to be dangerous and vicious, and specifically allows municipalities to ban or restrict these canine breeds and types.

Under the gun are Rottweilers, American Pit Bull Terriers, American Staffordshire Terriers, Staffordshire Bull Terriers, and generic pit bulls and pit bull terriers.

The bill avoids state restrictions on these breeds by turning the responsibility for limits or bans back to local jurisdictions. As an alternative to declaring these dogs vicious or dangerous by their appearance, HB4213 mandates that hearing officers consider the dog's breed as a substantial part of the evidence when determining guilt or innocence in an alleged aggressive incident. This provision can easily tip the scale against the dog and lead to fines and excess costs for owners and death for their pets.

The bill also tightens requirements for keeping dangerous or vicious dogs with provisions that will seriously impact owners of the scheduled breeds if breed identity is part of the evidence. HB4213 also requires that

- a vicious dog be muzzled when not confined in a residence, and
- a dangerous dog be kept on a leash no longer than six feet and muzzled when outdoors or when it has access to outdoors.

If a dog is declared dangerous or vicious, owners must also purchase full-coverage liability insurance in an amount not yet determined. Failure to confine a dangerous or vicious dog is a felony under the bill, and if the dangerous or vicious dog attacks a child, an elderly person, or a handicapped person, the owner will face Class 1 felony charges, the highest felony level.

Illinois legislators will also consider HB4367, (<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/94/HB/PDF/09400HB4367lv.pdf>) another bill to amend the state's animal control law. HB4367 leaves intact the current prohibition on local breed specific laws but contains some other provisions that are problematic. We'll post an alert on that bill in the near future.

What you can do about HB4213

HB4213 has been assigned to the House Agriculture and Conservation Committee and has been scheduled for hearing on January 18. Obviously, time is of the essence; please write your letters now if you are an Illinois resident or attend dog shows or performance events in that state.

Address letters about HB4213 to:

Representative Kurt M. Granberg, chairman
House Agriculture & Conservation Committee
300 Capitol Building
Springfield, IL 62706
Telephone: (217) 782-0066; Fax: (217) 557-7598

Contact the bill sponsor:

Representative Michael Tryon
244-W Stratton Office Building
Springfield, IL 62706
Telephone: (217) 782-0432; Fax: (217) 782-1275

NAIA Trust opposes breed specific legislation as unworkable, unfair, and unreliable. Laws that target certain breeds give citizens a false impression that dog problems have been solved, cause responsible owners to fear and disdain government, and lead to or exacerbate neighborhood squabbles. A link to the NAIA Trust letter to the Illinois Agriculture and Conservation Committee will be posted soon.