



JULIE LASSA

STATE SENATOR

Testimony on Senate Bill 191

Chairman Grothman and members of the Senate Judiciary and Labor Committee,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak to you today in favor Senate Bill 191, named "Leo's Bill", which was the name of one the pit bulls that was rescued in 2007 from Bad Newz Kennels, the kennel run by NFL player Michael Vick.

Current Wisconsin law dictates that any dog over one year of age who shows signs of having participated in dog fighting must be put down. These animals have no chance to be rehabilitated and adopted in our state. However, in Virginia, 49 out of the 51 dogs that were rescued at Bad Newz Kennels were rehabilitated and adopted. If Leo were to have been located in Wisconsin instead of Virginia, he would have been put down.

Thankfully, Leo was adopted by a woman in Los Gatos, California where he was trained and served as a certified therapy dog. Leo spent two to three hours a week visiting cancer patients and troubled teens. Unfortunately, Leo had a severe seizure disorder and passed away in 2011, but is an example of how these animals can be rehabilitated and go on to become therapy dogs, police dogs and family pets.

Representative Spiros and I have drafted an amendment to clarify that the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection would be the agency responsible for promulgating rules to specify the type of temperament testing a dog would undergo by a humane officer, pound, local humane society or a person designated by the court to decide if the dog poses a threat to humans or other animals. That person may then choose to either have the dog euthanized or release the dog to another person other than the owner.

Thank you again for allowing me to speak to you regarding this legislation which would allow animals like Leo a second chance at life. I welcome any questions you may have.



JOHN SPIROS

State Representative • 86th Assembly District

Testimony on Senate Bill 191

I would like to thank the committee members for allowing me to speak today in favor of Senate Bill 191.

I speak to you, not only as the bill's author, but also as an animal lover. SB 191, also known as Leo's Bill, is named after one of the pit bulls rescued from Bad Newz Kennels, the dog-fighting ring run by NFL player Michael Vick. After his rescue, Leo was given a temperament test and began rehabilitation; he became a certified therapy dog, providing smiles and support to hospital patients and at-risk youth.

Unfortunately, if Leo had been located in Wisconsin, he would have been put down. This bill does not protect animals that are viscous or aggressive, it merely allows for the possibility that some of these dogs can be saved and go on to become loving companions and pets. Of the 49 dogs taken from Michael Vick's property, only two were deemed ineligible for adoption.

During the drafting of this bill, my office heard from veterinarians, animal behaviorists, rescue organizations and animal lovers that are willing to care for these animals and believe in their ability to be rehabilitated. The statutes this bill affects have not been updated or changed since 1997. Knowledge of animal temperament was in its infancy, with the first certifying exam for veterinary behaviorists being given just two years before these statutes were passed. Our knowledge of animal behavior, behavior modification and rehabilitation have advanced leaps and bounds in the past 16 years. It is time we updated our laws to match what we now know is possible – that these animals *can* be saved.

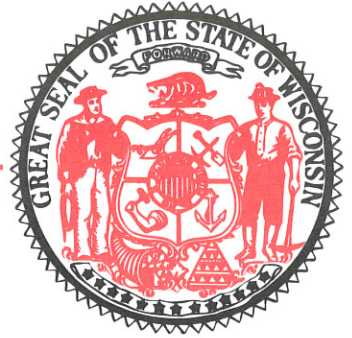
When I first proposed this legislation, I was asked if it was necessary. I believe that it is. In the past five months alone, there have been more 30 dogs seized from suspected dog fighting operations in the state of Wisconsin. Euthanizing these animals for the crimes of their owners is not the answer.

On a personal level, as someone who has owned both a Doberman Pincher and a Boxer, I believe that, no matter the breed, dogs are not born vicious and, given the chance, their ability to love is unmatched. I believe these animals deserve to be treated on a case by case basis and not mandatorily euthanized.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions.

FRED A. RISSER

Wisconsin State Senator



Risser Statement on SB 191
October 29, 2013

Contact:
Senator Fred Risser
608-266-1627

Tuesday, 10.29.13 | 2PM | 201 SE | Committee on Judiciary and Labor

SB 191 *Relating to: animals believed to have been involved in fighting or being held as evidence.* By Senators Lassa and Risser, and cosponsored by Representatives Spriros, Berceau, Bernier, Jacque, Johnson, Nass, Ohnstad, Pasch, Schraa, Shankland, Sinicki, Taylor, and Weatherston.

Senator Grothman and members of the committee, thank you for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill 191. This legislation would add permissive language to current statute relating to animals seized in animal fighting.

Current law requires the destruction of an animal who has been used in animal fighting and who's owner has been convicted of that crime. Current law does not allow for a review of the animal to assess whether or not it is a candidate for rehabilitation and rehoming, and as such allows for healthy animals with potential for rehabilitation to be indiscriminately destroyed.

Senate Bill 191 would change the language of current state statute to allow for the custodian of the animal to make an assessment of the animal's potential for rehabilitation and rehoming and release it to another person other than the previous owner if it qualifies.

Just six years ago, the story of Michael Vick's enormous dog fighting ring made headlines. This story has a happy ending. Of the 51 pit bulls seized from Vick's compound, 49 found homes. This remarkable recovery rate can be attributed to dedicated professionals who worked to rehabilitate and rehome these dogs who otherwise would've been destroyed.

This bipartisan legislation is good public policy. It acknowledges that some animals used in animal fighting are treatable and offers a humane alternative to the unnecessary killing of otherwise healthy animals.

I encourage the committee to vote in favor of this legislation and would be happy to answer any questions.

To Whom It May Concern:

I would like to thank Senators Lassa and Risser; Representatives Spiros, Berceau, Bernier, Jacque, Johnson, Nass, Ohnstad, Pasch, Schraa, Shankland, Sinicki, C. Taylor and Weatherston for their sponsorship of SB 191.

Special thanks to Senator Grothman for bringing this item to a public hearing.

I would also like to thank Senator Carpenter, who is my Senator, for co-authoring this bill, as well as presenting his own bill, SB 319. SB 319 is another big step in the right direction for seized victims of cruelty.

I'm sorry I can't be here in person- this issue is the most important issue I've ever dealt with. It's the cause I've spent almost every day for the past 29 months working on in order to help animals that were seized as evidence in court cases under State Statute 173.12.

My organization has just formed – but I've been fighting for the lives of 16 court case dogs in Milwaukee since the day they were seized by MPD. My organization is called Justice Alliance for Court Case Dogs.

I live in Milwaukee, and had lived there for all but 2 years of my life. The 2 years that I've lived away were spent in Chicago – where I volunteered for the Safe Humane program for Court Case Dogs.

It was during these two years that I made a formative discovery – that dogs that had bad owners mainly just wanted to be dogs. They wanted love, they wanted structure. They wanted a good person to exist with. For this, they would be loyal and loving back – just like any dog.

I met Puppet – a terrifying name for a huge, scowl laden pittie. I saw him laying with a volunteer of Safe Humane, and having overcome my fear of a big pittie with a scowl on his face, I approached cautiously. He licked my face and it was then I knew everything I heard about fight case dogs was wrong.

I met Gamble – a dog who was seized because in Chicago felons were not allowed to have unaltered dogs – a good law by the way. I spent the day handling Gamble for an adoption event. He was so proud to have me as his human for a day – I sponsored his escape from Chicago Animal Care and Control, and he found refuge at Hope Rescues in Alton, IL, and now resides in his forever home.

I saw court case dogs move from Animal Control to being good and valued and much beloved members of families.

While I lived in Chicago, I often wondered how Wisconsin treats their animals that are seized and awaiting the trials of their abusers. I found out no more than 2 months after coming home. There is no “plan”. Instead, there is bad law, easily misinterpreted law, and laws that blindly judge the innocent. Laws that until now, have kept 16 dogs held in the

evidence locker for 2 years and 5 months since MPD seized them in an “instigating animal fighting” case. Laws that very well may kill them only because they had a bad owner.

Their owners are free – and allegedly spend their efforts breeding dogs for cash. Umm. Tax. Free. Cash, I would guess.

The dogs that were seized –they are not free- they’ve spent their days, and nights, in solitary confinement. They eat, sleep, pee, poop in their same little cage day after day. They get excited when someone walks by the outside door– that is their stimulation. How do I know this? They papered over the door window so they don’t bark.

In previous cases, dogs held for such a long time allegedly became cage crazy – an easy excuse to kill them. Our laws state that dogs that show signs of fighting and are over one year old must be “disposed of”.

<long pause>

If you were in the Milwaukee Police Department, would you be anxious to bring in more animal fight cases, knowing there was a good deal of negative publicity about dogs being held as evidence for over two years? Even in cases where you knew without a doubt someone was fighting their dogs in the back yard? Or if there were even more organized events? Maybe, maybe not. Maybe you have a drug case or maybe you have something else on the bad guys- but they probably won’t go down for what is a felony in all States.

I want to call attention to the fact that Wisconsin ranks #42- close to the bottom- by the Humane Society of the United States, for our lenient laws for dogfighting, being a spectator at a dogfight, or possession of dogs for fighting – so our work here is just beginning.

We need to shorten the time it takes to bring the accused to justice. We need to stop treating innocent animals as partners in crime. We need to evaluate all animal victims of cruelty individually instead of handing them a death sentence after putting them in an evidence locker for years.

Start by passing SB 191. I ask that you make the law retro-active so as to cover all dogs that are seized.

Thank You,

David Mangold
Justice Alliance for Court Case Dogs, Inc.
985 W Morgan
Milwaukee, WI 53221

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 191 (October 29, 2013)

My name is Kathy Pobloskie and I am the Director of Wisconsin Voters for Companion Animals. We are a grass roots, bi-partisan, companion animal advocacy group. We do not accept donations of any kind. We provide information and alerts about companion animal legislation in the state of Wisconsin. We also provide information to voters about Wisconsin lawmakers with regards to their voting records and their opinions on animal legislation. We educate and recruit animal lovers and voters who want to get involved with their local communities.

Animal welfare is a truly bi-partisan issue. Pets have almost always graced the White House and Governors Mansions around the nation. Approximately 70% of Americans own a pet and those owners will spend an estimated 55 **billion** dollars on their pets in the U.S. in 2013. Whether Republican, Democrat or Independent – one thing is clear. **Americans Love their pets!**

Unfortunately Wisconsin lags far behind in humane legislation and was recently ranked #42 in the nation by the Humane Society of the United States.

The vast majority of pet owners want safe, humane communities. The Michael Vick dogs changed the nation's thinking about fight-bust dogs. These dogs are victims; and currently in Wisconsin they are double victims. They are victims of their original abuser and then they will become victims of the system that will ultimately kill them.

Many of Michael Vick's dogs went on to become cherished family pets and even therapy dogs. It is time for Wisconsin to change their outdated laws.

Senate Bill 191 is a good step in the right direction. I strongly urge you to pass Senate Bill 191 so we can start to catch up with the rest of the nation in our animal welfare laws.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Pobloskie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "K" and "P".

Kathy Pobloskie

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