



Testimony of Courtney Protz-Sanders, spokesperson in support of SB239

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Courtney Protz-Sanders. I am a Michigan resident here today to testify on behalf of several animal welfare organizations. I am the founder and executive director of a non-profit, all-breed dog and cat rescue that has been operating throughout southeast Michigan for 10 years. I am a Board Trustee for Michigan's Political Action Committee for Animals, which is a bipartisan statewide PAC that helps communities develop, enact and enforce animal-friendly ordinances and public safety measures as they relate to companion pets. Lastly, I am the spokesperson for Make Michigan Next, which is a coalition of animal welfare organizations that came together to end the merciless, half-hazard discrimination of dog owners in our state, legislation known as BSL.

The organizations I represent have witnessed firsthand the damage that BSL does to people, to families and to communities. Public safety is critically important to all of us. It's our top priority when we work with municipalities to develop animal related ordinances.

The mismanagement of dogs is an issue that leads to community problems and public safety concerns. Laws that will effectively correct this problem have to focus on the cause of the problem – the OWNER mismanagement. We model new legislation and ordinances after existing, effective legislation, and ordinances that are working well in other communities. Why start over and reinvent the wheel? Use what has proven to work.

Twenty states have adopted legislation very similar to Senate Bill 239. Why reinvent the wheel? Look to what is already working elsewhere. Make Michigan Next.

Ordinances that do not work, meaning the intended outcome to improve public safety isn't achieved, are overwhelmingly based on fear and emotion. As policymakers yourselves, you know that fear-based legislation is a waste of time, dollars and resources and will ultimately not achieve the desired result.

Communities should concentrate on holding reckless owners accountable and responsible. The simple truth is that breed discrimination doesn't work. We know that from looking at the communities that do have BSL in place. Dog bites have gone up, not down. Banned breeds are still living in the community, only now they're hidden from public view, which often times means that they are also lacking proper veterinary care, proper exercise, training and socialization – all of which are critical components to creating a healthy, well-balanced dog of any type.

Senate Bill 239 allows and encourages local governments to adopt or to strengthen existing dangerous dog laws and pet owner responsibility ordinances. The key to these laws and why they are effective is that they focus on all dog owners, not just some dog owners. They treat all property owners fairly and equally, based on a pet's misbehavior, not on what the pet looks like.

I implore you, the organizations I represent encourage you, and hundreds of thousands of voters that we represent urge you to please vote YES on Senate Bill 239. Please help us make our communities safer through fair and equal treatment of all property owners who choose a dog that best fits their family and by preventing ineffective, unenforceable laws from continuing to tear families apart. Thank you for your time.