



# NATIONAL ANIMAL INTEREST ALLIANCE

*Working for the People who look after America's Animals*

## NAIA salutes Senator Deckert

### Oregon lawmakers send landmark dangerous dog bill to governor for signature



Oregon State Senator  
Ryan Deckert, D

Oregon lawmakers turned a bill that had disastrous consequences for dog owners into a dangerous dog law that holds owners responsible for their dogs' actions and punishes those guilty of endangering public safety by failing to control their pets.

SB844 was introduced by Oregon State Senator Ryan Deckert (D) following two attacks by pit bull dogs in Portland. NAIA opposed the original version of the bill because it contained breed specific language and required registration of dog breeders.

NAIA national director Patti Strand contacted the senator to explain the futility of depending on breed-specific laws and breeder registration to solve problems caused by irresponsible owners, and Senator Deckert listened.

Determined to write a good bill instead of simply reacting to an emergency, the senator sought expert advice and convened a work group that included shelter directors, a veterinarian, the NAIA national director and others to recommend changes. His final bill was first-rate; it dropped the breed-specific provisions and breeder registration requirements in favor of a plan that holds dog keepers accountable for creating a nuisance or a community safety crisis and recognizes that rural constituents with working dogs have different needs than those who keep dogs in cities and suburbs.

Dog enthusiasts from NAIA and local AKC clubs stepped up to the plate to support the modifications. Strand served on the work group that produced the changes and NAIA board member Sharon Beck worked with people in rural areas to get their input. American Staffordshire Terrier fancier Karen Herrold and NAIA members Mary Strom and Lorraine Still gave testimony at hearings. Lawmakers in the state House and Senate worked in bi-partisan cooperation to pass this legislation for Oregonians.

SB 844's salient features are:

- An increase in fines and jail time for failure to properly maintain a dangerous dog that kills a person;
- Assignment of owner responsibility for economic loss due to injury or property damage caused by the dog;
- A definition of a dangerous dog as one that has inflicted serious physical injury without provocation, has been used in commission of a crime, or is a repeat offender after being judged potentially dangerous; and



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- A requirement that the governing body or court consider the circumstances of the bite or incident before declaring the dog a nuisance or dangerous, including the dog's behavior prior to and subsequent to the incident, the potential for safe relocation of the dog, and the likelihood that the keeper is willing and able to prevent additional incidents.

"The key to having effective dog laws is making *irresponsible dog owners accountable* for the problems caused by their dogs," said Strand. "This is true whether the problem is nuisance barking or off leash menacing. Only laws that draw meaningful distinctions between owners who are responsible and ones who are not will lead to the improvements we all seek. Only an ordinance that penalizes the lawbreakers without harming dog lovers who responsibly care for their dogs will succeed. Oregon lawmakers have wisely chosen this path to hold dog owners accountable."

SB844 is not perfect. As often happens with bills passed in a rush at the end of a legislative session, it needs tweaking to make sure that legislative intent to protect responsible dog owners is kept intact. To bring the bill in line with the intent expressed in hearings and debate, Senator Deckert said that he will introduce an amendment next session to clarify a provision that could be misinterpreted as allowing authorities to require sterilization of any dog impounded for running at large.

The final version of SB 844 echoes many provisions in the *NAIA Guide to Constructing Successful Pet-friendly Ordinances*, a booklet available on the NAIA website at <http://www.naiaonline.org/body/pdfs/PetFriendlyGuide.pdf>. To see the bill as sent to the governor for his signature, see B-Engrossed Senate Bill 844 at <http://www.leg.state.or.us/05reg/measpdf/sb0800.dir/sb0844.b.pdf>

NAIA serves as a resource for animal control agencies, city and county governments, and state lawmakers who are looking for answers to animal control dilemmas. NAIA hosts conferences and seminars to help develop practical and effective solutions. Contact NAIA at [naia@involved.com](mailto:naia@involved.com) or (503) 761-1139 for more information.