

EXECUTIVE CHAMBER, CITY OF PAWTUCKET, RHODE ISLAND

DONALD R. GREBIEN
MAYOR

July 10, 2013

The Honorable Lincoln D. Chafee
Governor
222 State House
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Governor Chafee:

On behalf of the residents of the City of Pawtucket, we are requesting that you VETO legislation passed by the general assembly at the end of their session, 2013-H 5671, AN ACT RELATING TO ANIMALS AND ANIMAL HUSBANDRY - DOGS AND VICIOUS DOGS, which would prevent cities and towns from enacting any regulation or ordinance specific to any particular breed of dog or cat.

We certainly respect and appreciate the love of pit bulls and all dogs by the supporters of the bill. However, as public officials, we must do what is necessary to protect the health and welfare of the two and four-legged residents of our city. While we agree that some pit bulls can make good pets, the number and severity of pit bull attacks against people and other animals in the early 2000's required us to take the action we did.

During the early 2000's, Pawtucket Animal Control Officers responded to many calls about pit bulls seriously injuring people and injuring or killing other animals. Two of the worst cases involved a nine-month pregnant woman who received deep cuts to her arms, legs, shoulder and a broken arm and a child who received severe facial injuries from a pit bull bite to the face. While many of these attacks were caused by pit bulls escaping from their owners' control, other attacks were the result of drug dealers using pit bulls to attack police officers during drug raids.

While the proponents of the bill will argue that single-breed ordinances do not work, the results in Pawtucket dramatically prove that they do work. The ordinance banning pit bulls in Pawtucket has worked exceedingly well. In 2003, the year before our ordinance took effect, 135 pit bulls were taken in at the Pawtucket Animal Control Shelter for a variety of health and safety reasons, all from Pawtucket, none from mutual aid, with 48 pit bulls needing to be euthanized. In 2012, 72 pit bulls were taken in, only 41 from Pawtucket, with only six needing to be being euthanized (see attached). That's a tremendous improvement.



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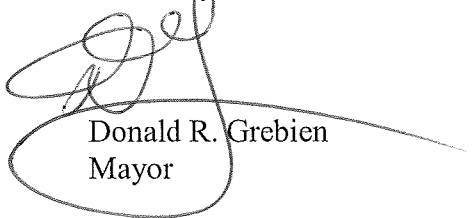
In a June 28, 2013, story in *The Times* of Pawtucket, a reporter wrote that Dr. E. J. Finocchio, director of the RI Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, stated that before Pawtucket banned pit bulls in 2004 RSPCA regularly convened vicious dog hearings for pit bulls corralled in Pawtucket. The reporter quoted Dr. Finocchio as saying, "Since the city passed that law we have not had a vicious dog hearing come out of Pawtucket." We believe that our ordinance certainly is working.

It is the responsibility of local government to oversee animal control and to ensure the public safety of the cities and towns. To accomplish this may require different regulations in crowded, urban centers with little or no spaces in which dogs may run around compared to less crowded rural areas with plenty of open spaces for dogs to enjoy. Therefore, it should be left to local officials to do what is necessary to protect the humans and the animals in their particular cities and towns.

Since Pawtucket's ordinances were in place prior to passage of this bill, which appears to be prospective in nature, we do not necessarily believe that the legislation will prevent us from enforcing our ban on pit bulls. Regardless, for the reasons stated above, we strongly oppose passage of this legislation and ask that you VETO this bill when it comes before you.

Thank you for your consideration on this matter

Sincerely,



Donald R. Grebien
Mayor



David P. Moran
Council President

	Pitbull intake Pawtucket	Pitbull intake Mutual aid	Total Intake	Pitbulls euthanized
2003	135	0	135	48
2004	110	9	119	38
2005	51	6	57	14
2006	45	4	49	14
2007	40	6	46	18
2008	65	16	81	8
2009	61	10	71	13
2010	53	24	77	10
2011	70	15	85	8
2012	41	31	72	6

These are the pitbull intake and euthanasia statistics we have on file. Our computer system does not go back any further than 2004. The figures in 2003 listed above are estimates based on some of the paper records we were able to locate. Prior to the city ordinance in 2004 the numbers were much higher and as you can see, improved significantly with the ordinance in place.

Prepared by John Holmes, Pawtucket Animal Control Officer

The TIMES
6/28/13

Bone of contention

Local ACCOs oppose removal of ban on pit bulls

By RUSS OLIVO
rolivo@woonsocketcall.com

PAWTUCKET—The bill was championed by animal rights groups and boosters of that most controversial of canines, the pit bull.

But Animal Control Officer John Holmes says state lawmakers won't be doing the dogs any favors if they prohibit cities and towns from enforcing local bans on pit bulls.

The city banned "pits" in 2004 after a series of attacks on pets and humans that caused serious injuries. Authorities also suspected illegal dog fights were being staged in Pawtucket after finding the mangled remains of deceased animals abandoned-like trash.

"This was a tool to keep the dogs from being abused and to keep them out of the wrong hands," says Holmes. "Now if this law comes to pass I'm afraid we're going to go backwards. We're going to see more pit bulls and we're going to have more euthanizations."

The House overwhelmingly passed the measure Wednesday despite the objections of lawmakers from Pawtucket and Woonsocket. If affirmed by the Senate and signed by the governor, the law would make existing prohibitions on pit bulls in Pawtucket and Central Falls obsolete, and prevent Woonsocket, which has proposed a similar ban, from moving forward.

The measure was spearheaded by

a group of lawmakers from the Greater Providence area, led by State Rep. Thomas Palangio.

"We felt it was unfair to pick on a breed of dog when the problem is not the dog but the owner," said State Rep. Charlene Lima (D-Cranston, Providence), one of the co-sponsors of the measure. "The opposition from Woonsocket and Pawtucket was there because they felt we should not be messing with town ordinances."

Woonsocket Animal Control Officer Doris Kay says Lima's right — they shouldn't. The legislature should leave it up to the local jurisdictions to decide how to deal with

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Pit bulls

pit bulls on their own turf, she says.

"It should be left up to the local cities and towns to decide because they're closest to the problem," she says. "What's going on in Lincoln isn't the same as what's going on in Woonsocket."

There were 16 dogs at the Woonsocket Animal Control Facility Thursday, and every one was a pit bull, including a nursing mother with six pups seized

in a raid at the home of an accused drug dealer.

Without question, they are Woonsocket's most popular dog — and also the breed that bites most often, with the most injurious results, according to police.

Kay says the House measure, which passed by a vote of 56-9, is a victory for the pro-pit bull lobby, a well-organized coalition of

defenders of the American Staffordshire Terrier and related breeds, commonly known as pit bulls. The network has grown stronger over the years in response to what pit bull lovers perceive as unfair attacks on the breed, which are often portrayed as inherently mean and aggressive. Defenders say the dogs

aren't born bad, but many end up aggressive as a result of abuse, neglect or willful training by owners who want them for protection or macho props.

"You could assemble a crowd of a hundred pit bull supporters on an hour's notice, and that's something that no other dog can do," says Kay.

Dr. E.J. Finocchio, director of the Rhode Island Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, agrees. He says the triumph of the House bill on Wednesday is largely a reflection of the power of the pro pit-bull lobby.

Finocchio says the nature-versus-nurture debate over pit bulls is something like the feud between pro-

lifters and women's rights when it comes to abortion. "It will never be settled."

That's because the best science about the nature of pit bulls is mixed, according to Finocchio. Some pit bulls raised in aggressive environments turn out to be winners. Some born to winny parents turn out to be aggressive.

But Finocchio says pit bulls do display higher levels of predatory behavior than many other breeds, and when they bite they do more damage than other canines because their jaws are more muscular and bigger than most dogs.

"Unfortunately for the pit bull, if you did a google search on dog attacks that resulted in fatalities, the pit

bull would be right at the top of the list," he says.

Finocchio declines to take a position on the House bill or municipal bans on specific breeds, but his records do seem to support Holmes. Finocchio said that before Pawtucket banned pit bulls in 2004, RISPCA regularly convened vicious dog hearings for pit bulls corralled in Pawtucket. Such hearings can result in everything from muzzling and castration orders to confinement and euthanization, depending on the severity of the dog's behavior.

On average, says Finocchio, RISPCA convenes about 65 vicious dog hearings a year. "A majority involve pit bulls," says

Finocchio, but they're not dogs coming out of Pawtucket any longer.

"Since the city passed that law we have not had a vicious dog hearing come out of Pawtucket," he said.

Holmes says the local law essentially banned the introduction of new pit bulls into the city after 2004. Residents who already had pit bulls before the law was passed were allowed to keep them, and even get a new one if their existing dog died. Citing a high number of pit bull attacks, the City Council in Woonsocket has twice considered implementing a law modeled after Pawtucket's, but has so far declined to move forward despite pressure from the police.

PROVIDENCE

Tip leads to dog that attacked boy

Pit-bull-Labrador mix, identified as dog that attacked Jason Feit, 12, is being held for a vicious-dog hearing in two weeks

By FELICE J. FREYER
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Tipped off by an anonymous caller, the police on Thursday located and took into custody two dogs, one of which had attacked and seriously injured a Little Leaguer on Saturday.

The attacking dog, a pit-bull-Labrador mix, is being held for a vicious-dog hearing in two weeks. The other dog will be held until it can be confirmed that it's properly registered and vaccinated, said Maj. Thomas Verdi of the Providence Police.

Verdi said that the police found both dogs at 175 Governor St. They fit the description and the coach who witnessed the attack identified them, he said.

The dogs' owner, Ariella Palumbo, 22, is out of town until next week. The man who was attending the dogs at the time of the attack has not been identified. He let the dogs run off the leash and he left the scene after the attack.

Verdi said he was looking into whether the owner or the person who was with the dogs can be charged with any crime. "The owner is a female. Whoever had control of dogs at the time of attack was a male. That person just failed to render aid," Verdi said. "He took the dogs and left. That's very disconcerting."

Meanwhile, the victim, 12-year-old Jason Feit, had to undergo his first round of rabies shots on Wednesday, said his father, David Feit. Four nurses administered four shots simultaneously, one in each limb. If the dogs are confirmed to be rabies-free, Jason probably won't need further shots.

The attack took place as the Fox Point/East Side Little League team was running laps inside a fence at a Gano Street ball field. The unleashed dog was outside the fence running along with them, until it discovered a gap in the fence. "The dog just went in and went after Jason," Feit said, "unprovoked, unexpected. Jason likes dogs."

The dog bit through to the bone on Jason's lower leg and tore at his forearm. The wound was so severe that Jason needed several hours of surgery at Hasbro Children's Hospital, Feit said.

"As far as we can tell now, there's no permanent damage," Feit said. Jason still can't walk, however, and on Thursday was feeling under the weather, his father said.

Feit said that Officer Frank Moody came to the family's Tenth Street home Thursday morning to tell them that the dogs had been found. "The Providence police have been awesome," Feit said.

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on a hot holiday



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL/KATHY BORCHERS

Lincoln was packed by noon on the Fourth of July, and so was the water, on a hot, sunny day with high 90s during the afternoon. A heat advisory was in effect for most of the holiday.

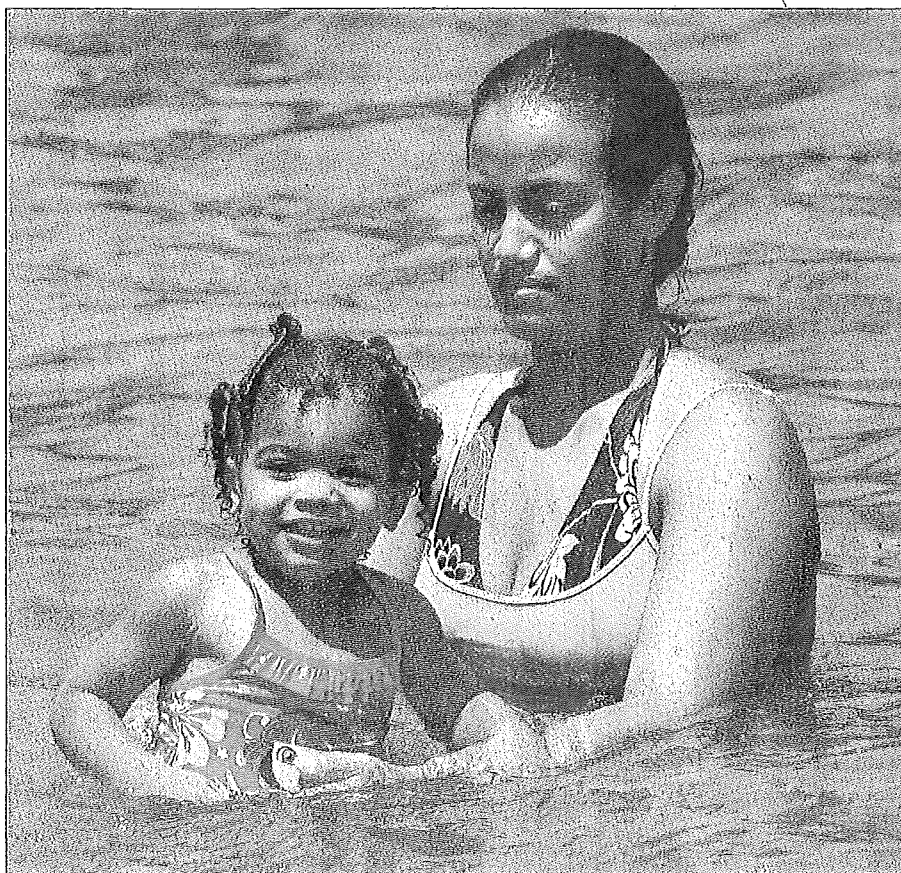


PHOTO BY KATHY BORCHERS FOR THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

Pit bull mauls one, bites four others

N. Smithfield police shoot dog

By RUSS OLIVO

rolivo@woonsocketcall.com

NORTH SMITHFIELD — A Fourth of July party turned into a scene of chaos and panic when a pit bull went on a biting rampage that didn't end until the animal was shot dead by police.

Five people were taken to Landmark Medical Center with bite wounds, some serious, after the pit bull was killed about 5:30 p.m. Thursday, said police Capt. Glenn G. Lamoureux.

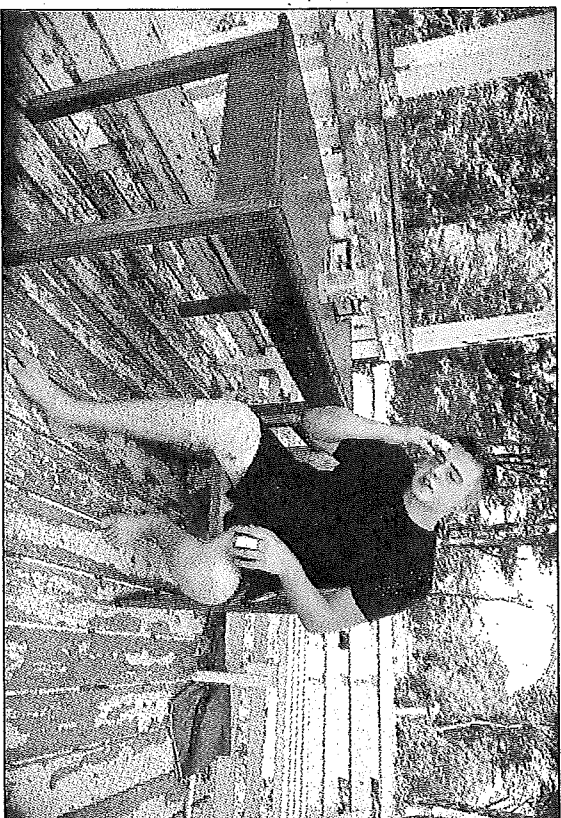
Two officers fired one shot each into the dog. Lamoureux said the officers had little choice because several people were on the ground bleeding and the dog was still going after people when the officers arrived. They tried pepper-spraying

the animal before shooting it, but the dog showed no signs of giving up.

"As soon as they got to the scene they realized how chaotic it was," said Lamoureux. "We've had our share of dog bites over the years but nothing ever like this in my recollection."

The ordeal took place at 835 Eddie Dowling Highway, where Jennifer Gilmore was holding a combination Fourth of July bash and going-away party for her son, Joey Romeo Bishop, 18. Bishop is a recent graduate of Woonsocket High School and was due to report for active duty in the National Guard next week after a stint in the WHS Junior Reserve Officer

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Joseph Bishop Jr., 18, sits on his back porch Friday recovering from wounds he suffered when he was mauled by a pit bull at a backyard cookout on Thursday.

The Times/Ernest A. Brown

Dog

Training Corps.

The dog, Bootsy, was an adult male pit bull left in her care by a neighbor who was away, said Gilmore. The dog was supposed to be confined to a sun room during the party, but someone apparently let it out.

The trigger for the dog's temper tantrum was apparently some "horseplay" between her son and his friend, Phillip Alobwede, 18. The two teens were

shoving each other when the dog went after Alobwede.

The dog went "straight for Phil and he was basically ripping up his leg," said Bishop.

The victims were injured over the course of what were actually three separate attacks, he said. Bishop said he and others managed to subdue the dog and get it in the house following the initial attack.

They thought the dog

was safely confined to the house, but it jumped out of an open window and resumed attacking him and others who had gathered at the party.

The dog was captured a second time and returned to the house, but before anyone figure out how he had escaped the first time, the dog jumped out the window again and started biting people.

"It was crazy," said Bishop. "It was like a scene from the movie 'Cujo.'"

Before it was over, five people were bitten seriously enough to be transported to the hospital. In addition to himself and Alobwede, Bishop said his teenage girlfriend and two adults in their 30s were also wounded.

Bishop said he suffered at least seven bite wounds and numerous punctures on his knee, torso and crotch. At one point Bishop remarked that he had come "within a centimeter of being neutered." Bishop said doctors closed some of the most serious wounds with stitches.

During the attack, Bishop said his mother tried whacking the dog on the head several times with a massive cinderblock. Others tried striking it with a piece of timber and kicking it, but the dog just kept attacking.

When the police turned their firearms on the animal, said Bishop, his only reaction was a sense of relief.

"They really had no choice but to shoot this dog," said Bishop. "We all backed away when it happened so they could take care of it."

Bishop said he was more worried than frightened during the episode. While pit bulls are noted for their strength and powerful jaws, Bishop said what surprised him most was the dog's unbridled determination to go after people and bite them, despite all the efforts of the humans to discourage him.

"This is a dog that escaped three times and kept coming," he said. "The fact that he kept coming straight for me was kind of a worry."

Bishop said he was sup-

At one point Bishop remarked that he had come "within a centimeter of being neutered."

posed to report to Fort Benning, Ga. for basic training early next week, but he's fairly certain that will be put off until he's well-healed.

Ironically, the attack comes just a day after the General Assembly approved a bill prohibiting cities and towns from enacting "breed specific" legislation to ban pit bulls or any other dogs. The law has no impact in North Smithfield, where no such ordinance is on the books, but it will force Pawtucket and Central Fall to stop enforcing longtime bans on pit bulls.

Woonsocket has twice considered enacting such a ban, but has tabled the proposal, citing the costs and difficulty in enforcing the measure.

The pit bull isn't the first poster-dog for bad canine behavior, but it's not the dog that's to blame, state lawmakers say — it's the people who raise them, often with the intent of encouraging aggressive behavior.

"Years ago it was German Shepherds that were 'bad' dogs," the lead sponsor of the bill, State Rep. Thomas Palangio (D-Dist. 3, Providence), said in a statement. "Then it was Dobermans, then Rottweilers and today it is Pit Bulls. No specific breed of dog is intrinsically bad or vicious or dangerous."

Bishop and his mother said they were very familiar with Bootsy and had never known the animal to behave in a vicious manner until Thursday. The dog barked at passersby from the driveway, but had never tried to bite anyone before, they said.

Follow Russ Olivo on Twitter @russolivo.

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