



St. John Ambulance Saint-Jean

Council for Ontario

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February 11, 2005

Honourable Michael Bryant
Ministry of the Attorney General
720 Bay St, 11th Floor
Toronto, ON M5G 2K1

Re: Bill 132 - Dog breed-specific legislation

Dear Mr. Bryant:

The St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog program is a voluntary, not-for-profit community service that provides the companionship of a dog to individuals in health care institutions across Ontario and throughout Canada. Founded in 1992, many of our clients include patients and/or residents in palliative care settings, acute care settings, chronic care, long-term care and retirement settings.

The program currently enjoys a human membership of over 1400 volunteers in Ontario alone and associated with these volunteers are an equal number dogs of just about every breed. As I am sure you can appreciate, any breed-specific legislation could seriously impact our program, and therefore I am requesting, on behalf of the program, that you re-consider Bill 132 as it is currently proposed.

The dogs and volunteers (handlers) that participate in our program are carefully screened and part of this screening process mandates that all prospective dog/handler teams must participate in an evaluation process that thoroughly assesses the suitability of both the dog and the respective handler. This extensive evaluation process assesses dog temperament, handling and control, safety and security, and the dog/handler's ability to provide therapeutic care in the types of settings that they will encounter.

Our practice has always been not to restrict any dog from participating in the program based on breed-type alone. It is our educated opinion that there are positive and negative traits in all breeds of dogs and as such, we feel the breed-specific legislation as proposed would not only be ineffective, but will also establish a false sense of security in the eyes of the public. As a community service organization, our volunteers are

actively involved in educating the public on the merits of safety when approaching any dog, regardless of breed.

Our position, like that of many other related national organizations (e.g. Canadian Veterinary Medical Association and the Canadian Kennel Club), is that the promotion of responsible ownership, coupled with public education would prove to be far more effective than the proposed legislation in Bill 132. We trust you will find our comments helpful in your review of the proposed legislation and we thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully

Terry Fast
Provincial Therapy Dog Coordinator