



**Best  
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Animal  
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September 14, 2017

County of Ingham, Law & Courts Committee Members  
Chairperson Kara Hope  
Vice-Chairperson Teri Banas  
Victor Celentino  
Carol Koenig  
Bryan Crenshaw  
Randy Schafer  
Randy Maiville

Dear Committee Members:

I am a legislative attorney for Best Friends Animal Society, a national animal welfare organization. As you may be aware, Best Friends was one of the organizations that took on the care of the dogs seized from the nationally-known Michael Vick dog fighting operation. In fact, several of the dogs still remain in our care at our sanctuary in Utah today. Although, I work nationally for Best Friends, I am also a resident of Michigan and previously had a law practice here that focused primarily on animal-related matters.

I wanted to make the committee aware of the previous cases in Michigan which allowed dogs seized from fighting rings to be placed, either by adoption or with another animal welfare agency, as opposed to being euthanized. All of this information has been provided to the Ingham County Animal Shelter, as well as the prosecutor's office in an effort to provide a better outcome for the victims seized in this case. I was disturbed, but not surprised, by the reading of the statute applicable to the dogs in this case (MCL §750.49). However, I am surprised that given the information below, that the prosecutor and Animal Shelter would chose to ignore previous court cases that would have prevented the needless deaths of at least 5 dogs seized in this case, simply because they were "fighting dogs".

First, in 2010, Judge Lawson in the Western District of Michigan made specific findings (which are highlighted in his opinion) that Michigan law **does not require the euthanization of dogs seized from fighting operations**. In that case, many, if not most of the dogs were evaluated and allowed to be placed. Further, the person who drafted and assisted in the passage of MCL 750.49 as it is written today, provided a letter in this case that stated that the intent of the law was never to summarily kill dogs seized in a fighting operation, without being evaluated.

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In addition, in Monroe County, MI in 2011 a similar decision was reached by the circuit court there allowing dogs from a fighting operation to be transferred to an animal welfare organization for placement. All of the dogs from that operation were safely placed into new homes, and some are still enjoying normal lives with a family. Finally, a few years ago in Kalamazoo County, HSUS was involved in a similar situation. Ultimately, those dogs were evaluated, as in the other cases, and placed with animal welfare organizations as well.

Best Friends and I, as a Michigan resident, would love nothing better than to allow the victims in this case to have the opportunity to be placed into new, loving homes, or at least offered the opportunity at evaluation. If you would like further information on the above precedents on these types of situations in Michigan, I would be happy to provide them.

Again, thank you for your time, and please feel free to reach out with any questions or further concerns.

Respectfully,

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