

Congress to Consider Stricter Dogfighting Laws

Changes to Animal Welfare Act call for stiffer penalties and broader regulations in dogfighting cases.

Posted: August 1, 2007, 5 a.m. EST

In light of the Michael Vick dogfighting charges, legislation was introduced in both Congressional houses last week calling for stricter penalties in an attempt to combat the fights. The bills call for punishment from all who participate — from spectators to those who train, transport, and buy the dogs.

Sen. John Kerry introduced the bill July 26, 2007, which proposes to amend the Animal Welfare Act to upgrade existing federal dogfighting laws. The bill, co-sponsored by Sen. Barbara Boxer, addresses several issues. Rep. Betty Sutton of Ohio introduced a nearly identical bill in the House on July 27.

“Dogfighting is simply barbaric and inhumane,” Kerry said, “and it is unacceptable that this cruel so-called sport still exists. There is no place for dogfighting in our civilized society and we must outlaw it. It is time for us to address this issue with the seriousness it deserves.”

The key issues addressed in the bills include removing the current requirement for prosecutors to prove at least one of the dogs crossed state lines for a fight, making it a federal offense to be present at a dogfight, calling for longer prison terms, and making it a crime to buy, sell, transport, train, or possess fighting dogs.

“This federal ban of dogfighting is long overdue,” Boxer said. “There is no redeeming value in watching animals tear each other apart. In fact, it’s a blight on society.”

Specific language used in the bills may face a few challenges as they’re debated on Capitol Hill.

“I would like to see the language of these bills clarified so that the term ‘dogfighting venture’ specifically excludes situations where stock dogs are trained and for their abilities to bay and hold dogs and cattle,” said Cindy Cooke, legislative specialist for the United Kennel Club. “Otherwise, I’m delighted to see additional legislation that will make it easier to prosecute people involved in all aspects of dog fighting.”