

Victims of pit bull attacks push for new law

By Wayne Peal
Staff writer

Joanne Camiller remembers the day when three vicious dogs attacked her husband and two sons. The dogs, of which two were believed to be pit bull terriers, knocked the family's 5-year-old son to the ground, ripping open his forehead and destroying one of his ear ducts. As well as biting his arms, legs and stomach. They also mauled her husband, Frank, and the family's 11-year-old son before police killed one dog and took the others away.

In all, the Camillers said, the family suffered at least \$10,000 in medical bills and untold physical and mental anguish.

"IT'S THE kind of thing we wouldn't want to wish on anyone else," Joanne Camiller said. That's why the Livonia couple testified Tuesday before members of the state Legislature, urging them to pass a new state law to prevent future attacks.

While the state Senate approved new regulations for pit bull terriers last year, House members are under-

cided whether to adopt that bill or a new bill regulating all animals that attack human beings.

Some who testified said the pit-bull-only law, as proposed by state Sen. Joe Mack, D-Ironwood, couldn't be enforced because it was too specific. Others said the House bill, proposed by Rep. Willis Bullard, R-Milford, was too vague and offered too little to prevent vicious animals from attacking.

House Judiciary Committee members took no action after Tuesday's hearing, sending both bills to a House subcommittee for a possible compromise.

While some who testified were clearly disappointed by the delay, the Camillers said they were optimistic a new law could be enacted this year.

"What I'd like to see is a combination of the bills," Joanne Camiller said. "I want to see provisions included for keeping these animals under lock and key so they won't attack again. Fences must be high, and they must be unable to burrow underneath them."

PIT BULLS have been the focus of much controversy in the past year.

Livonia began considering a city ordinance after the Dec. 2 attack on the Camiller family. A Bloomfield Hills doctor was ordered to remove his pit bull from the neighborhood by a district court judge after a September attack on a Rochester Hills man.

While breeders report many animals have been kept as household pets without incident, others said the dogs have proved vicious killers. Pit bulls are commonly used in illegal dog fights, as well as to protect drug

houses, law enforcement officials said.

Critics, like Mack, charge the dogs are walking time bombs, capable of attacking without being provoked.

"This is not a pet," he said. "This is an animal that can snap at any time and be a vicious killer."

Bullard, however, said he saw no evidence that pit bulls, by their nature, were any more dangerous than other breeds.

"No one has come up with any conclusive evidence that a pit bull is a breed apart," Bullard said. "You don't round up people on the suspicion they might be violent."

Those who packed Tuesday's hearing heard often-emotional testimony. A Waterford woman wept when she recalled being attacked.

"I've never seen such intensity,"

said Waterford Police Officer Scott Thomas of the attack.

A MICHIGAN Humane society representative, however, said pit bulls aren't necessarily vicious and that other, non-vicious breeds are often mistaken for pit bulls.

Humane Society spokeswoman Eileen Liska said regulations on all vicious animals were preferable to regulations on pit bulls only.

Stricter enforcement of anti-dog-fighting laws would also help, Liska said.

"We need to do something to stop dog fighting in the state, we also need greater enforcement of (existing) animal control laws," Liska said.

Pit bulls are the only breed not put up for adoption at Humane Society shelters.

"It puts us in a quandary," said Ron Blauel of the Humane Society's Westland Shelter in a telephone interview after the hearing. "Some of them are sweet. The problem with pit bulls are some have been trained to be vicious. There's also been breeding and in-breeding for specific traits."

Two pit bull puppies that were once given away by the shelter were returned after they attacked other animals, Blauel said.

While House members are undecided which measure to adopt, they apparently aren't undecided about pit bulls' violent potential.

"If I lived in a high crime area, I know what kind of dog I'd want to defend my home," said Rep. Perry Bullard, D-Ann Arbor, who conducted the hearing.

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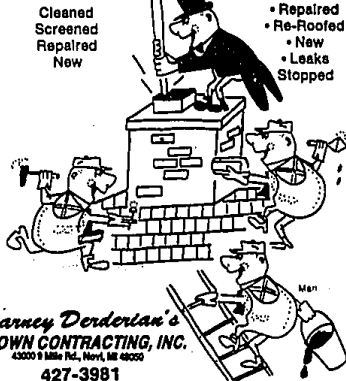
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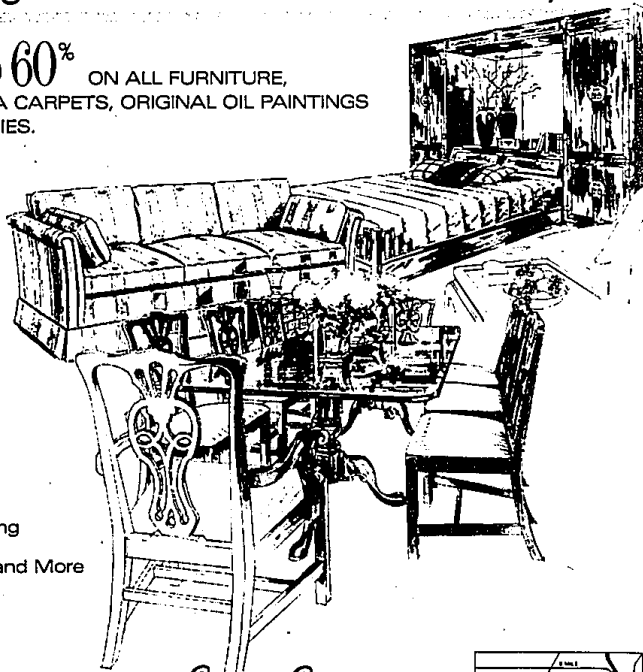
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