

October 1, 2017

Re. Testimony in support of HB263 - Dogs on the Patio

My name is Michelle Gonzalez and I am a veterinarian in Dublin, Ohio. I have been in private practice in Ohio for the last 17 years. Over the years, we have witnessed how animals have become members of the family and not just 'pets' and it is not rare to see people out and about with their four legged friends for more than just a daily walk. The importance of the human animal bond is well researched and it is clear that pets not only provide companionship, but also help reduce anxiety and depression.

Often on social media you see pictures of people with their dogs at different pet-friendly businesses, such as home improvement stores, which is important for pet owners but also provides great publicity for these businesses. Some of these pictures are of people enjoying a cup of coffee or a meal at an outdoor patio. While I, as a veterinarian, clearly understand the concern for keeping animals and humans healthy and decreasing risk of communicable diseases, I do not think that completely banning animals from these outdoor facilities is the answer. In my opinion, each restaurant should be able to make a decision on whether to allow dogs in outdoor areas and strict guidelines should be set that each facility must follow to decrease the risk for transmission of disease.

I would recommend guidelines similar to the ones provided by the Wisconsin Restaurant Association (https://www.wirerestaurant.org/info/alerts/140619_dogs.php). In my opinion, these guidelines would help provide a safe environment for patrons of businesses that allow dogs on their facilities. In summary, these guidelines are as follow:

1. Only dogs are allowed on outdoor eating areas under control of their owner.
2. The facility must have a separate entrance to the outdoor area to keep dogs from entering the restaurant.
3. No food or drink preparation can occur in areas where animals are allowed access and materials, such as utensils and dishes, cannot be stored in these outdoor areas.
4. Dogs are not allowed on tables or chairs.
5. The restaurant staff is responsible for cleaning and disinfecting of areas soiled by pet excrement or body fluids.
6. Restaurant employees cannot have direct contact with the dogs.

It would be each food establishment's responsibility to abide by these guidelines if they choose to allow dogs at their outdoor areas, and the Department of Health could make evaluations periodically or if a complaint is filed to ensure the safety of the public. Food establishments must have signage indicating that dogs are allowed on their outdoor areas and staff must inform customers requesting to be seated in those areas so that they can make a decision to decline being seated outdoors if they do not wish to be around dogs. The rules for pet owners must be clearly displayed in the outdoor area and pet owners not following proper protocols or unable to control their dog must be asked to leave.

I do hope that this helps provide some insight from someone who sees the importance of the human - animal bond on a daily basis and that we can allow food business owners to make a decision of whether they would welcome dogs in their outdoor facilities.

Thank you for your time.

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