



June 3, 2005

Chairwoman Cindy Abrams
Ohio House of Representatives
Public Safety Committee
HB 247 Proponent Testimony

Chairwoman Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the House Public Safety Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to provide proponent testimony for HB 247, which would revise Ohio's dangerous dog laws.

My name is Dr. Dana Schwartz. I am a pediatric general surgeon, which means that I treat a wide range of pathology in all ages of children, ranging from neonates to teenagers. After completing almost a decade of training, I have been in practice at Nationwide Children's hospital for nearly 4 years. As part of my practice, I respond when children are significantly injured and are transported to our emergency department for care. Traumatic injuries are the leading cause of death in children and adolescents, and with mechanisms ranging from gunshot wounds, to motor vehicle crashes, burns, falls, and animal bites. I have a particular interest in these patients, and currently serve as the Associate Trauma Medical Director and Associate Burn Director. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony today in support of HB 247.

The Trauma Department at Nationwide Children's receives one of the highest volumes of trauma patients in the state of Ohio. Dog bites are one of the leading causes of emergency room visits in children, and the trauma surgical team works closely with emergency department physicians to assess and prioritize multi-injury issues resulting from dog bites. We then collaborate with a large team, including neurosurgeons, facial trauma surgeons, and orthopedic surgeons, to treat the young victims of these attacks, whose symptoms can range from puncture wounds to extensive disfigurement requiring multi-stage reconstructive surgery and causing lifelong disability. We have also had the unfortunate experience of treating multiple children in the last several years who have died from their dog bite injuries.

Most children who are bitten by a dog are under the age of 9, and these injuries are more common in the summertime when children are home from school and more animals are spending time outside. At Nationwide Children's Hospital, we typically treat over 400 patients per year with dog bite injuries, meaning we see one patient bitten by a dog, if not more than one, every single day. Those numbers do not include our urgent care and primary care visits, so the real number of children affected is likely even higher. In addition to disfigurement and deeper injuries, dog bites put patients at risk of infection. Most patients are treated in emergency department and released from the hospital, but a subset are admitted with severe injuries, spending weeks to months in the hospital, and undergoing multiple surgeries.

Treating patients with significant dog bites is challenging from the moment they arrive. With injuries to the face and neck, some patients cannot breathe well on their own, and we must act quickly to address blood loss, secure their airway, and rush to perform imaging tests so that we can identify life-threatening injuries to the brain and internal organs. Once the acute care is complete, many of these patients require multiple surgeries for reconstruction and years of follow-up with physical therapy and psychology.

One patient comes to mind who was playing in his own yard when he was attacked by his neighbor's two pitbulls. Due to persistence of these dogs in the attack, his younger sister had to go find a parent for help, and by the time the patient was separated from the dogs, most of his nose, upper lip, and face had been degloved, meaning much of the skin and soft tissue had been torn away. He also had multiple puncture wounds all over his body and skin torn from much of his right forearm. From the trauma bay, he was rushed to the operating room, where he required a tracheostomy to secure his airway, and multiple surgeons, including ENT and plastic surgeons, spend several hours repairing his injuries as best they could. His initial hospitalization lasted 5 weeks, he required a feeding tube, underwent a skin graft to his face, and he still has weekly visits with several doctors and therapists. In addition to the physical pain and suffering caused by this injury, the long-term psychologic impact has been significant for this patient and his family. These dog bite injuries can be life-altering for patients, and prevention is crucial to protecting children.

Nationwide Children's applauds Representative Miller – as well as Reps Thomas and Lawson-Rowe - for introducing these bills which have the potential to protect children all across Ohio. Chair Abrams and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to provide testimony and I am happy to answer questions.

Dana M Schwartz, MD, FACS



Assistant Professor of Clinical Surgery
The Ohio State University College of Medicine
Division of Pediatric Surgery
Nationwide Children's Hospital