

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY — CHAPTER

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An Act to amend and reenact §§ 3.2-6540 and 3.2-6542 of the Code of Virginia, relating to the dangerous dog registry.

[H 537]

Approved

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 3.2-6540 and 3.2-6542 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 3.2-6540. Control of dangerous or vicious dogs; penalties.

A. As used in this section:

"Dangerous dog" means a canine or canine crossbreed that has bitten, attacked, or inflicted injury on a person or companion animal that is a dog or cat, or killed a companion animal that is a dog or cat. When a dog attacks or bites a companion animal that is a dog or cat, the attacking or biting dog shall not be deemed dangerous: (i) if no serious physical injury as determined by a licensed veterinarian has occurred to the dog or cat as a result of the attack or bite; (ii) if both animals are owned by the same person; (iii) if such attack occurs on the property of the attacking or biting dog's owner or custodian; or (iv) for other good cause as determined by the court. No dog shall be found to be a dangerous dog as a result of biting, attacking, or inflicting injury on a dog or cat while engaged with an owner or custodian as part of lawful hunting or participating in an organized, lawful dog handling event. No dog that has bitten, attacked, or inflicted injury on a person shall be found to be a dangerous dog if the court determines, based on the totality of the evidence before it, that the dog is not dangerous or a threat to the community.

"Vicious dog" means a canine or canine crossbreed that has: (i) killed a person; (ii) inflicted serious injury to a person, including multiple bites, serious disfigurement, serious impairment of health, or serious impairment of a bodily function; or (iii) continued to exhibit the behavior that resulted in a previous finding by a court or, on or before July 1, 2006, by an animal control officer as authorized by ordinance, that it is a dangerous dog, provided that its owner has been given notice of that finding.

B. Any law-enforcement officer or animal control officer who has reason to believe that a canine or canine crossbreed within his jurisdiction is a dangerous dog or vicious dog shall apply to a magistrate serving the jurisdiction for the issuance of a summons requiring the owner or custodian, if known, to appear before a general district court at a specified time. The summons shall advise the owner of the nature of the proceeding and the matters at issue. If a law-enforcement officer successfully makes an application for the issuance of a summons, he shall contact the local animal control officer and inform him of the location of the dog and the relevant facts pertaining to his belief that the dog is dangerous or vicious. The animal control officer shall confine the animal until such time as evidence shall be heard and a verdict rendered. If the animal control officer determines that the owner or custodian can confine the animal in a manner that protects the public safety, he may permit the owner or custodian to confine the animal until such time as evidence shall be heard and a verdict rendered. The court, through its contempt powers, may compel the owner, custodian or harbinger of the animal to produce the animal. If, after hearing the evidence, the court finds that the animal is a dangerous dog, the court shall order the animal's owner to comply with the provisions of this section. If, after hearing the evidence, the court finds that the animal is a vicious dog, the court shall order the animal euthanized in accordance with the provisions of § 3.2-6562. The court, upon finding the animal to be a dangerous or vicious dog, may order the owner, custodian, or harbinger thereof to pay restitution for actual damages to any person injured by the animal or whose companion animal was injured or killed by the animal. The procedure for appeal and trial shall be the same as provided by law for misdemeanors. Trial by jury shall be as provided in Article 4 (§ 19.2-260 et seq.) of Chapter 15 of Title 19.2. The Commonwealth shall be required to prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt.

C. No canine or canine crossbreed shall be found to be a dangerous dog or vicious dog solely because it is a particular breed, nor is the ownership of a particular breed of canine or canine crossbreed prohibited. No animal shall be found to be a dangerous dog or vicious dog if the threat, injury or damage was sustained by a person who was: (i) committing, at the time, a crime upon the premises occupied by the animal's owner or custodian; (ii) committing, at the time, a willful trespass upon the premises occupied by the animal's owner or custodian; or (iii) provoking, tormenting, or physically abusing the animal, or can be shown to have repeatedly provoked, tormented, abused, or assaulted the animal at other times. No police dog that was engaged in the performance of its duties as such at the time of the acts complained of shall be found to be a dangerous dog or a vicious dog. No animal that,

57 at the time of the acts complained of, was responding to pain or injury, or was protecting itself, its
 58 kennel, its offspring, a person, or its owner's or custodian's property, shall be found to be a dangerous
 59 dog or a vicious dog.

60 D. If the owner of an animal found to be a dangerous dog is a minor, the custodial parent or legal
 61 guardian shall be responsible for complying with all requirements of this section.

62 E. The owner of any animal found to be a dangerous dog shall, within ~~40~~ 45 days of such finding,
 63 obtain a dangerous dog registration certificate from the local animal control officer or treasurer for a fee
 64 of ~~\$50~~ \$150, in addition to other fees that may be authorized by law. The local animal control officer or
 65 treasurer shall also provide the owner with a uniformly designed tag that identifies the animal as a
 66 dangerous dog. The owner shall affix the tag to the animal's collar and ensure that the animal wears the
 67 collar and tag at all times. ~~All~~ *By January 31 of each year, until such time as the dangerous dog is*
 68 *deceased, all certificates obtained pursuant to this subsection shall be updated and renewed annually for*
 69 *the same a fee of \$85 and in the same manner as the initial certificate was obtained. The animal control*
 70 *officer shall provide a copy of the dangerous dog registration certificate and verification of compliance*
 71 *to the State Veterinarian post registration information on the Virginia Dangerous Dog Registry.*

72 F. All dangerous dog registration certificates or renewals thereof required to be obtained under this
 73 section shall only be issued to persons 18 years of age or older who present satisfactory evidence: (i) of
 74 the animal's current rabies vaccination, if applicable; (ii) that the animal has been neutered or spayed;
 75 and (iii) that the animal is and will be confined in a proper enclosure or is and will be confined inside
 76 the owner's residence or is and will be muzzled and confined in the owner's fenced-in yard until the
 77 proper enclosure is constructed. In addition, owners who apply for certificates or renewals thereof under
 78 this section shall not be issued a certificate or renewal thereof unless they present satisfactory evidence
 79 that: (i) their residence is and will continue to be posted with clearly visible signs warning both minors
 80 and adults of the presence of a dangerous dog on the property; and (ii) the animal has been permanently
 81 identified by means of a tattoo on the inside thigh or by electronic implantation. All certificates or
 82 renewals thereof required to be obtained under this section shall only be issued to persons who present
 83 satisfactory evidence that the owner has liability insurance coverage, to the value of at least \$100,000,
 84 that covers animal bites. The owner may obtain and maintain a bond in surety, in lieu of liability
 85 insurance, to the value of at least \$100,000.

86 G. While on the property of its owner, an animal found to be a dangerous dog shall be confined
 87 indoors or in a securely enclosed and locked structure of sufficient height and design to prevent its
 88 escape or direct contact with or entry by minors, adults, or other animals. The structure shall be
 89 designed to provide the animal with shelter from the elements of nature. When off its owner's property,
 90 an animal found to be a dangerous dog shall be kept on a leash and muzzled in such a manner as not to
 91 cause injury to the animal or interfere with the animal's vision or respiration, but so as to prevent it
 92 from biting a person or another animal.

93 H. ~~The owner of any dog found to be dangerous shall register the animal with the Commonwealth of~~
 94 ~~Virginia Dangerous Dog Registry, as established under § 3.2-6542, within 45 days of such a finding by~~
 95 ~~any appropriate court.~~

96 The owner shall also cause the local animal control officer to be promptly notified of: (i) the names,
 97 addresses, and telephone numbers of all owners; (ii) all of the means necessary to locate the owner and
 98 the dog at any time; (iii) any complaints or incidents of attack by the dog upon any person or cat or
 99 dog; (iv) any claims made or lawsuits brought as a result of any attack; (v) tattoo or chip identification
 100 information or both; (vi) proof of insurance or surety bond; and (vii) the death of the dog.

101 I. After an animal has been found to be a dangerous dog, the animal's owner shall immediately, upon
 102 learning of same, cause the local animal control authority to be notified if the animal: (i) is loose or
 103 unconfined; or (ii) bites a person or attacks another animal; or (iii) is sold, given away, or dies. Any
 104 owner of a dangerous dog who relocates to a new address shall, within 10 days of relocating, provide
 105 written notice to the appropriate local animal control authority for the old address from which the
 106 animal has moved and the new address to which the animal has been moved.

107 J. Any owner or custodian of a canine or canine crossbreed or other animal is guilty of a:

108 1. Class 2 misdemeanor if the canine or canine crossbreed previously declared a dangerous dog
 109 pursuant to this section, when such declaration arose out of a separate and distinct incident, attacks and
 110 injures or kills a cat or dog that is a companion animal belonging to another person;

111 2. Class 1 misdemeanor if the canine or canine crossbreed previously declared a dangerous dog
 112 pursuant to this section, when such declaration arose out of a separate and distinct incident, bites a
 113 human being or attacks a human being causing bodily injury; or

114 3. Class 6 felony if any owner or custodian whose willful act or omission in the care, control, or
 115 containment of a canine, canine crossbreed, or other animal is so gross, wanton, and culpable as to show
 116 a reckless disregard for human life, and is the proximate cause of such dog or other animal attacking
 117 and causing serious bodily injury to any person.

118 The provisions of this subsection shall not apply to any animal that, at the time of the acts
 119 complained of, was responding to pain or injury, or was protecting itself, its kennel, its offspring, a
 120 person, or its owner's or custodian's property, or when the animal is a police dog that is engaged in the
 121 performance of its duties at the time of the attack.

122 K. The owner of any animal that has been found to be a dangerous dog who willfully fails to
 123 comply with the requirements of this section is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.

124 L. All fees collected pursuant to this section, less the costs incurred by the animal control authority
 125 in producing and distributing the certificates and tags required by this section *and fees due to the State*
 126 *Veterinarian for maintenance of the Virginia Dangerous Dog Registry*, shall be paid into a special
 127 dedicated fund in the treasury of the locality for the purpose of paying the expenses of any training
 128 course required under § 3.2-6556.

129 M. The governing body of any locality may enact an ordinance parallel to this statute regulating
 130 dangerous and vicious dogs. No locality may impose a felony penalty for violation of such ordinances.

131 § 3.2-6542. Establishment of Dangerous Dog Registry.

132 The Commissioner shall establish the ~~Commonwealth~~ of Virginia Dangerous Dog Registry to be
 133 maintained by the Department, Office of ~~Veterinary Services~~. Each owner of any canine or canine
 134 crossbreed found by any appropriate court to be a dangerous dog shall be required to register the animal
 135 as a dangerous dog within 45 days of such finding *Animal Care and Health Policy*. The State
 136 Veterinarian shall receive, post, and maintain the information provided *and posted* by the owner, animal
 137 control officers, ~~and or~~ other such officials statewide on a website. All information collected for the
 138 Dangerous Dog Registry shall be available to animal control officers via the website. Registration
 139 *information* shall include the name of the animal, a photograph, sex, age, weight, primary breed,
 140 secondary breed, color and markings, whether spayed or neutered, the acts that resulted in the dog being
 141 designated as dangerous and associated trial docket information, microchip or tattoo number, address
 142 where the animal is maintained, name of the owner, address of the owner, telephone numbers of the
 143 owner, and a statement that the owner has complied with the provisions of the dangerous dog order. The
 144 address of the owner along with the name and breed of the dangerous dog, the acts that resulted in the
 145 dog being deemed dangerous, and information necessary to access court records of the adjudication shall
 146 be available to the general public. By January 31 of each year, until such time as the dangerous dog is
 147 deceased, the owner shall submit *to an animal control officer or other designated local official of the*
 148 *county or city in which he currently resides* a renewal registration that shall include all information
 149 contained in the original registration and any updates. The owner shall verify the information is accurate
 150 by annual resubmissions. ~~The owner shall submit to the State Veterinarian a \$100 initial registration fee~~
 151 ~~and a \$35 renewal registration fee~~ *The animal control officer or other such official shall post any*
 152 *updates on the website*. In the event that the dangerous dog is moved to a different location, or contact
 153 information for the owner changes in any way at any time, the owner shall submit a renewal containing
 154 the address of the new location or other updated information within 10 days of such move or change *to*
 155 *an animal control officer or other such official for the new location*. There shall be no charge for any
 156 updated information provided between renewals. *Each county and city shall submit to the State*
 157 *Veterinarian by January 31 of each year \$90 for each dangerous dog it initially registered and \$25 for*
 158 *each dangerous dog for which it renewed registration within the previous calendar year*. Any funds
 159 collected pursuant to this section shall be used by the State Veterinarian to maintain the registry and
 160 website. The website list shall be known as the Virginia Dangerous Dog Registry.

161 Actions of the Department relating to the establishment, operation, and maintenance of the
 162 ~~Commonwealth~~ of Virginia Dangerous Dog Registry under this section shall be exempt from the
 163 provisions of the Administrative Process Act (§ 2.2-4000 et seq.).

164 Copies of all records, documents, and other papers pertaining to the Dangerous Dog Registry that are
 165 duly certified and authenticated in writing on the face of such documents to be true copies by the State
 166 Veterinarian or the Dangerous Dog Registry administrator shall be received as evidence with like effect
 167 as the original records, documents, or other papers in all courts of the Commonwealth.