The Dangers of "Guardianship"

Be Your Dog's Owner, Not Its "Guardian"

UNLIKE MOST OTHER PROPERTY, PETS ARE LOVED BY THEIR OWNERS AND THEIR OWNERS ARE EMOTIONALLY ATTACHED TO THEM. For centuries, owners have been able to protect the dogs they love because lawmakers and the courts have treated animals—whether livestock or pets—as property. Now, some animal rights groups want to change that classification, ultimately ending owners' legal rights to keep and enjoy their beloved pets.

What's Wrong With the Word "Guardian?"

The concept of replacing the term animal "owner" with "guardian" was first introduced in San Francisco by an extreme animal rights group. Since then, several cities as well as the state of Rhode Island have passed laws recognizing animal guardians. **Proponents claim that this promotes better treatment of animals without any legal ramifications. This is not true.**

To ensure that owners maintain their rights to keep pets, the American Kennel Club supports use of the term "owner" rather than "guardian." Labeling an individual as only an animal's "guardian" implies limits on their rights to that animal. This could create a number of serious problems in our communities:

- ***Personal Ownership Rights***—Dog owners have a right to protect their dogs (their property) from undue restrictions. Use of the term "guardian" represents a first step toward eliminating an individual's right to own, breed, sell and participate in events with dogs. If a dog is not technically "owned" by someone, legal questions can be raised about whether that person can sell the dog or even protect it from unwarranted seizure.
- ***Public Safety***— Removing the classification of dogs as property could result in numerous legal challenges. Legally, guardians might not be ultimately held responsible for their dogs' actions, making animal control enforcement more difficult.

> ***... the term "guardian" does nothing to promote more responsible treatment of dogs.***

- ***Veterinary and Health Care Challenges***—If people do not "own" their dogs, it could follow that they are not legally responsible for properly protecting and caring for them. Questions can be raised about who may legally make a decision regarding veterinary care, sterilization, or euthanasia—and even who is ultimately responsible to pay medical expenses. New liability concerns, while seemingly far-fetched, would likely cause veterinarians to obtain more extensive malpractice insurance—a cost that would have a direct effect on veterinary bills.
- ***Dangerous Legal Precedent***—Declassifying dogs as property also raises their legal status. Although some dog lovers might appreciate elevating their pet's status, this could establish negative long-term consequences. Many animal rights groups are seeking to convince the courts that animals have rights and should have the same status as humans. **Bestowing legal rights on animals is the first step in a larger campaign to end the keeping of pets and breeding altogether.**

Pets are special members of our families, but the term "guardian" does nothing to promote more responsible treatment of dogs. The American Kennel Club opposes the use of the term "guardian" when referring to the keeping of dogs. Instead, the AKC strongly supports efforts to educate the public about responsible dog ownership and ensure that all dogs receive the care, love, and attention they deserve.

For additional information, contact the AKC's Government Relations Department at (919) 816-3720 or doglaw@akc.org.

AKC Government Relations Department
8051 Arco Corporate Drive, Suite 100
Raleigh, NC 27617

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