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Testimony of Lee Greenwood, Legislative Attorney in support of HB. 1126

Good afternoon Chairman Singer, Vice-Chair Exum and members of the Committee. My name is Lee Greenwood and I am an attorney with Best Friends Animal Society. Best Friends is a national animal welfare nonprofit organization that works throughout the state and country to support legislation like HB 1126. Our mission is to protect the interests of companion animals and the responsible owners who care for them.

We believe strongly that when it comes to the regulation of pet dogs, either by a municipality or a common interest community, the focus should and must be on the behavior of the individual dog and owner. Arbitrary restrictions based on a dog's weight, size or perceived breed do nothing to promote public safety. Worse, these restrictions are almost always based on misinformation, myths and misperceptions, and the results are usually tragic.

Simply put, there is a dearth of available housing for responsible dog owners in Colorado. This problem is exacerbated if the pet in question is larger in size or looks like certain breeds. A recent survey of some 200 residential properties throughout the state found that only 1 of these "pet friendly" properties permits all dogs without restrictions, regardless of size, weight or breed. This data came from every corner of the state but was collected only in communities without municipal breed restrictions. In other words, even in places without breed specific legislation (BSL), finding housing for your pet is a serious problem.

The data found in the local survey has been replicated throughout the country. In fact, studies have consistently found that a lack of truly pet-friendly housing is one of the driving forces behind the separation of families and their pets. Some of these dogs can be rehomed with family or friends, but most of them end up in our municipal or nonprofit shelters. Sadly, many dogs that enter into those systems will not make it out alive even though they had previously been loving family pets. This is a preventable problem that HB 1126 will help to alleviate.

This common sense legislation will put the focus where it belongs, on the behavior of individual dogs and owners. That's the exact same reasoning that motivated this legislature in 2004 to pass a law prohibiting breed-specific legislation- a law that has helped to make Colorado one of the leading states for animal welfare. The rationale is the same now as then but the need is even greater today.

It's important to note that under the provisions of this bill, common interest communities will still be permitted to regulate dog behavior and take steps to protect their residents from dangerous and ill-behaving animals. That is the model for promoting a safe, clean and nuisance-free community.

House bill 1126 is the right choice for Colorado. It will protect the rights of pet dog owners and create truly pet-friendly communities throughout the state. At the same time, common interest communities will benefit from an influx of responsible owners that care about their property, their pets and their neighbors. Add to this the tax dollars saved by municipalities that will see fewer dogs surrendered to their shelters and you can see why HB 1126 is a win for everyone.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and with that, I am open to any questions you may have.