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Column for Week of:
December 24, 2007

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Responsible Dog Ownership

JEFFERSON CITY — On a late summer evening last September, a Jackson County couple thought they would go out for a jog. As they made their way through the rural and suburban areas of their run, they ran into a nightmare as a gigantic dog faced them in their path. The bull mastiff was a vicious animal that seemed intent to kill the couple as he lunged and attacked, first the woman and then her husband, as the couple found themselves locked in a frantic life-and-death struggle. When it was all done, the dog lay dead, strangled and stabbed by the hands of the man who now will be lucky to regain 70 percent of the use of his mangled hand and arm. His wife has a zig-zag of more than 60 stitches on her arm and a hand that will never recover from her battle to keep the dog from going for her jugular vein. Her husband said if the dog would have been able to squeeze out one more breath of life, it might have been him instead of the dog who lay dead. The owner was hit with a couple of misdemeanor violations: basically, not keeping his dog on a leash and allowing the dog to be a public nuisance. It's time our laws changed.

This tale is not at all the first story of vicious dog attacks in Eastern Jackson County. There have been many stories where pedestrians have been the victims of dangerous attacks, and it is only a matter of time before someone, perhaps a child, does not survive such an encounter. A new piece of legislation I have introduced will change Missouri's law to make it absolutely clear that citizens have the right to defend themselves or their family against such an attack.

My [Senate Bill 834](#) will give those who have a reasonable fear that they are in imminent danger of being harmed by a dog a defense against civil liability or criminal prosecution for killing or injuring the attacking dog. It also strengthens the rights of a citizen to protect their home from an animal that repeatedly trespasses and puts them in fear for their safety. Furthermore, the bill will strengthen the penalties against owners of vicious dogs and will give authorization to authorities to destroy any dog that is a habitual attacker.

Pets are an important part of many families' lives, bringing loyalty and companionship to the owners who take care of them. But we cannot allow irresponsible pet owners to jeopardize the safety of their neighbors by letting their animals run loose or by owning an animal they can't or just won't control.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.