

# Using Local Ordinances to Protect Dogs Who Live Outdoors



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

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# Introduction

**WE’VE ALL SEEN THEM:** in our neighborhoods, near our workplace, on our commute. Dogs who spend endless hours alone outdoors, many at the end of a chain. Frequently, these dogs are out in the worst weather conditions, lacking even basic protections from the elements—and too often, they don’t survive. Even during the most ideal physical conditions, their existence can be dreadfully lonely. For those of us passionate about animal protection, it is hard to imagine spending life this way.

For that reason, municipalities across the country have passed more than 1,000 ordinances to protect dogs who live outdoors, with new ones being passed frequently. This wave of ordinances suggests we are in the midst of a shift in the way society treats dogs. This toolkit is designed to help you build on that momentum by passing an ordinance in your own community.

This toolkit serves a few primary functions: to articulate why these ordinances are important; to explain what they typically include; and to offer tips for taking action through local policy. It’s worth noting from the beginning that there is no one-size-fits-all ordinance; what is appropriate for one community might not work for another. This toolkit offers a range of options so you can pass an ordinance that suits your area while enhancing protections for the dogs you love.

### WHY ARE THESE ORDINANCES IMPORTANT?

Ordinances that protect dogs who live outdoors (for simplicity, “DWLO”) are good for the community, and understanding the key benefits is important to your success. Here are some key considerations.

#### DWLO ORDINANCES HELP ANIMALS.

- Many dogs are confined outdoors 24 hours a day.
- Chains are often very heavy and short, limiting the ability to

move, and collars can become embedded, leading to painful injuries.

- Dogs can be strangled if the tether gets tangled or caught.
- DWLO are often at risk from extreme weather conditions, and many lack basic care.

#### DWLO ORDINANCES HELP LAW ENFORCEMENT.

- They create clear boundaries and set expectations.
- They usually result in fewer nuisance and dog-at-large complaints.
- They offer opportunities for meaningful discussion with pet owners about animal care.

#### DWLO ORDINANCES HELP THE COMMUNITY.

- Dogs chronically confined outdoors are a public nuisance, notorious for barking. Continuously chained or alone, they get lonely and frustrated and their outlet is to bark.
- When a dog is chained 24/7, he/she does not receive adequate exercise, and the lack of mobility is aggravating. Pent-up energy can manifest as barking, and anxiety can lead to increased aggression and protection of a dog’s space.
- We know that some people tether their dogs or keep them outside due to a lack of resources, or a lack of awareness about what is required. These ordinances provide clear expectations for pet owners about minimal levels of care, helping them avoid punitive action.

We have seen DWLO ordinances enforced effectively in a wide variety of communities across the country. For the dogs and the people who love them, we celebrate these ordinances and look forward to the future when even more are passed.

# INTRODUCTION

## DWLO ORDINANCES: KEY COMPONENTS

Ordinances that protect dogs who live outdoors generally include multiple components that serve to improve a dog's quality of life and/or limit the time she spends on a chain. The following primary inclusions should be considered:

### TIME LIMITS

- Completely prohibit, allowing no unattended tethering:
  - These are straightforward, making enforcement clear and offering incentives for outreach initiatives, but there's likely to be strong opposition.
- Set an amount of consecutive time or time within a 24-hour period during which tethering is allowed (e.g., no longer than 2 hours in a 24 hour period):
  - They can be challenging because officers rarely have blocks of time available to verify that a dog has been tethered beyond said limit.
- Prohibit tethering during certain hours of the day (e.g., not between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.).
  - Violations are immediately clear; ensures the dog is brought indoors with his family at least once a day.

### EXTREME WEATHER

- Restrict leaving a dog outdoors during severe weather and/or natural disasters—an ideal inclusion.
- Potentially the most compelling argument and a good starting point.
- Regulations apply to hot or cold weather and are usually crafted with specific temperatures and conditions, making enforcement straightforward.

### HUMANE STANDARDS FOR TETHERING/CHAINING

- Provide minimum standards of care. These generally will not get a dog off a chain, but when enforced positively, they can improve the quality of life.
  - **Collar or harness:**
    - Ensure that the tether is attached by a properly fitted collar or harness. No pinch, prong or choke types allowed.
  - **Tether:**
    - Not too heavy; maximum weight limit typically 1/10 or 1/8 of dog's body weight.
    - Length should be at least 5 times the length of the dog (from tip of nose to base of tail) and never less than 10 feet.
    - No logging or tow chains.

- All tethers should have swivels on both ends to prevent twisting and tangling, and they should not be close to strangulation hazards (e.g., a fence).
- **Food and water**
  - Most basic animal cruelty laws already require that dogs receive appropriate, nutritious food and clean water. For DWLO, it is especially important to monitor. If you have an opportunity to enhance this portion, you should.
  - Some ordinances stipulate that food and water bowls are cleaned daily or that water can't be frozen.
  - Provide a clear explanation of "adequate feed and water" to specify proper quantity and nutritive value, that it's provided in a clean and sanitary manner; and that it must be clean, fresh and potable.

### ENHANCED SHELTER DEFINITION

- All dogs who spend any period of unsupervised time outdoors must have shelter. Providing a clear definition of adequate shelter can drastically improve quality of life.
- This can include higher standards during certain times of year or weather events (e.g., shade during summer months, bedding during winter).
- Considerations should address ventilation, sanitation, structural strength and space.
- It can be helpful to include what does not merit "adequate shelter." Specifically: crawl spaces under buildings/decks, under or inside a vehicle; shelters made from materials easily degraded by the elements; carriers or crates designed for temporary housing; shelters with chain-link flooring, or shelters surrounded by waste and debris.



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# Taking action

## SO YOU'RE READY TO WORK ON AN ORDINANCE? LET'S DO IT!

The following is a basic outline of the key steps to passing an ordinance, but the HSUS is here to support you along the way! Please be in touch with your HSUS state director at *(state)@humanesociety.org* (e.g., *maryland@humanesociety.org*) to let them know where you'll be working and to find out how we can help.

### STEP ONE: RESEARCH THE ISSUE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

While we know these ordinances have worked well nationwide, it's important to research your community's specific challenges and needs. First, learn what language, if any, exists in your area. You may also want to look into how many calls animal control receives per year about dogs who live outdoors barking, getting loose, running at large or lacking access to food, water or shelter. This information should be available through a public information request, although you may be better served through an in-person meeting first (more on key stakeholders in step four!). Collecting recent cases or reports can also help shed light on the issue in your area.

### STEP TWO: LEARN THE PROCESS

The procedure for enacting local legislation varies around the country, so take the time to get familiar with the process in your community. Typically, for a city or county government, an ordinance is introduced by a member of that council. These individuals are usually called councilmembers or aldermen. In some cases, a proposed ordinance will go to a small committee for review. Other times, the entire council may vote on it without a committee hearing. Proposed ordinances may be discussed at several meetings

over a few months so that public comments may be heard. Your HSUS state director and a local official or government employee should be able to help you.

### STEP THREE: CREATE YOUR COALITION

A diverse coalition of individuals working collaboratively toward the common goal (a DWLO ordinance) is likely to have the best chance for success. It will show elected officials that a significant portion of the community supports the effort and ensures that the viewpoints of many stakeholders are heard.

When inviting members to join, be clear about the expectations. What will the coalition do? How often will you meet? Will your coalition have a name? Your coalition will have several responsibilities, including spreading the word, securing public support and lobbying local legislators.

Think creatively—and beyond animal protection—by including nontraditional participants who might have a vested interest. Some of the people who should be involved include:

- Law enforcement/animal control/animal services.
- Shelters, rescue groups or other animal welfare organizations.
- Veterinary professionals.
- Fire department representatives.
- Parents, community associations, insurance companies and anyone concerned about public safety.
- Utility companies, realtors or other workers who often encounter dogs in yards.
- Animal advocates.



## STEP FOUR: MEET THE STAKEHOLDERS

Your most important partners include the enforcement agency, the animal shelter and local legislators.

### Local law enforcement

The agency that will be tasked with enforcing the new ordinance should be at the table from the beginning to offer experience and insight. Soliciting their opinions and support is imperative to success. Pursue a meaningful relationship with your local enforcement agency long before you anticipate approaching them about the ordinance; it will go a long way. Some ways to be a law enforcement ally include:

- Considering an officer's perspective. Acknowledge that officers regularly put their safety on the line, confronting dangerous and stressful situations. Learn about the process, potentially through a ride-along or lunch meeting.
- Finding out what the agency's major needs are (in relation to animal protection) and trying to meet them (for example, host a fundraiser for supplies).
- Showing gratitude! Law enforcement officers have difficult jobs, and a little appreciation goes a long way. Send thank-you notes, emails or cards, or post positive comments on social media.

### Animal shelter/humane society/animal care and services agency

Your local animal care professionals will be able to speak to the challenges and issues that face your community—and their ability to navigate them. While we rarely see a DWLO ordinance lead to an

influx of surrendered or seized dogs, it is helpful to understand the shelter's capacity to assist when/if that occurs. As with engaging law enforcement, acts of kindness for your shelter will help foster a meaningful relationship.

Some ways to be a shelter ally include:

- Volunteering!
- Asking your shelter what they need and publishing that list in the local newspaper, on social media, etc., then starting a supply drive for the items (often blankets, food, towels or toys).
- Helping them create an Amazon wish list and sharing it (if they don't have one already).
- Stopping by with goodies for the staff to say thank you.
- Asking fellow rescuers, church groups, gym members, book club or any other group of animal lovers to chip in and send lunch to the staff or enrichment toys to the animals.
- Collecting clean boxes to use for feral cat hideaways if your shelter does not have the resources to purchase commercial cat boxes.
- Decorating the walls of the shelter lobby with thank-you notes and pictures from students.
- Checking in with the shelter director about what message(s) they want to share—and helping distribute that information throughout the community.
- Liking, commenting on and sharing their social media posts.

### Note: Fence-building groups

Fences for Fido, a Washington-based fence-building group, provides lifesaving, transformative services to families who need them. Fences for Fido also provides nationwide assistance to individuals interested in creating an unchaining coalition in their area. Some of their free resources include fence-building supply lists, tips for approaching the community and fundraising ideas. Creating such a group in your area alleviates many of the concerns about enacting a DWLO ordinance, specifically as it relates to regulations on tethering. The provided resources strengthen the bond between dogs and their people, which is the end goal of a DWLO ordinance. For more information, contact Kelly Peterson at [kpeterson@humane-society.org](mailto:kpeterson@humane-society.org).

### City/county council members

Elected officials should take constituents' interests seriously, so try talking to your council member, county commissioner or alderman first. If your elected representative is uninterested, try to find another official with an appreciation for animal protection and pitch the ordinance. If you cannot locate an official to discuss the pro-

cess, seek advice from the city manager or county administrator. Often your animal control or humane society can point you toward a sympathetic decision maker. Once you have identified an elected official, request a meeting to discuss the potential ordinance (and let your HSUS state director know, in case you need support).

### Arrange the meeting

- Call your official's office and make an appointment.
- Identify yourself as a constituent.
- Briefly explain what you would like to discuss.

### Prepare for the meeting

- Gather a small group of your allies (three is ideal) to accompany you during the meeting.
- Determine a clear message you want to convey beforehand. If in a group, divide up the tasks: Who will be the main spokesperson, who will answer questions on specific topics, who will take notes and who will write a follow-up letter? Include brief personal stories or experiences that demonstrate why DWLO is important to you or the group. Finally, keep your message brief and clear.
- List the potential arguments for and against a DWLO ordinance and craft responses.
- Prepare your message in a letter or fact sheet to leave with the elected official. Have other voters or organizations prepare letters of endorsement or other supporting materials.
- Role-play your presentation with others who can provide feedback. Practice until you are confident and know the information and responses to tough questions.



- Public officials will want to know the answers to the following questions:
  - Why is this issue important? You should be able to clearly articulate the problem.
  - How does this issue impact his/her district?
  - How will the proposed language solve the issue?
  - Who supports the ordinance?
  - Who opposes the ordinance?
  - Will the proposed ordinance have a significant fiscal impact?
  - How have other cities (ideally nearby) addressed DWLO?
  - Is there opportunity for positive (or negative) media?
  - How does his/her community feel about the issue?

### During the meeting

- Be on time. Sometimes elected officials may not be on time due to meetings or hearings. Be patient and flexible.
- Dress professionally. Initial impressions are important in this setting and a good one can only help your message.
- Make sure your opening remarks are brief and contain a clear description of the issue. State your position and what you want the elected official to do.
- Be careful not to accuse or insinuate that those who chain their dogs are "bad people." Language is important!
- If you lose your train of thought or get flustered, pull out your fact sheet to refresh your mind or let another member of the group pick up the discussion.
- After presenting your message, let the official respond. Body language can often reveal more than the discussion. Listen carefully. Answer questions as best you can. Do not make up answers. Acknowledge what you do not know. Make a note of the questions you could not answer and tell the legislator you will follow up.
- Keep the discussion focused on protecting DWLO. If the dialogue gets off course, steer it back.
- Ensure that no personal remarks are made. If you are not seeing eye-to-eye and are frustrated, move on to another part of the issue or politely end the meeting.

### After the meeting

- Immediately take notes regarding the main points of discussion, the official's remarks, any unanswered questions, etc.
- Complete your research to find information for unanswered questions.
- Promptly follow up with a thank-you letter that restates your key points, responds to outstanding questions and reiterates any commitments made.



**STEP FIVE: DRAFT THE ORDINANCE**

Based on meetings with your coalition and the key stakeholders, you will have a sense of which components you should include in the proposal.

First, determine if any DWLO language exists in city/county law. You can ask your local official for help in identifying that language if you cannot locate the ordinances online. You may already know what you want your ordinance to regulate, but it will have to be crafted into an appropriate format. Looking at ordinances that have passed elsewhere can give you some ideas about what it should look like. An attorney or a someone with ordinance experience might also be helpful.

As we mentioned previously, there is great variety between ordinances across the country, so it is important that your proposed language be a good fit for your community. Working with your coalition will help you navigate these decisions.

The following examples are sourced from ordinances across the country and can be used to develop an ordinance crafted to the needs of your community. You will note that each addresses one or more of the core inclusions addressed in this toolkit: time limits, extreme weather, humane standards and/or enhanced shelter.

**Complete prohibition:**

- A person may not restrain a dog with a chain or tether un-

less the person is holding the chain or tether.

Or

- Tethering is prohibited unless the dog is in visual range of the responsible party, and the responsible party is located outside with the dog.

**Extreme weather:**

No dog shall be left outside and unattended, regardless of access to an outdoor shelter, during any period in which a severe weather advisory or warning has been issued for the area by the National Weather Service, or if the temperature is below 32 degrees Fahrenheit or above 90 degrees Fahrenheit. This includes but is not limited to a dog in a securely fenced-in yard, a dog in a kennel or a dog tethered.

**Time restrictions and humane standards:**

It shall be unlawful for any person to allow a dog to be confined by use of a tether, chain or similar restraint: (1) between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. or when no owner or keeper of the dog is present on the premises; (2) by a tether of less than 10 feet in length, or less than four times the length of the dog’s body from tip of nose to base of tail, whichever is greater; (3) by a tether the length of which allows the dog to cross the property line of the property on which it is tethered; (4) using logging chain, tow chain

or other tether that causes injury or pain to the dog because of the material of which it is made or because of the size or weight of the tether; (5) by attaching the tether to the dog by a collar that is not properly fitted or by means of a choke chain collar, pinch collar or prong collar; (6) in an area likely to cause injury or pain to the dog because of entanglement or because of surrounding structures; (7) if the dog is not spayed/neutered, less than 6 months old or sick or injured.

**Enhanced shelter:**

For any dog left outside and unattended for more than 30 minutes during any period, the following must be provided:

- A shelter that is moisture-proof, wind-proof and of suitable size to accommodate the dog, allowing for freedom of movement to make normal postural adjustments, including the ability to stand, turn around and lie down with limbs outstretched. It shall be made of durable material with a solid, moisture-proof floor raised at least three inches from the ground. The roof shall extend eight inches over the doorway and not permit rain to enter inside the shelter. The shelter shall not be constructed of metal or any material that readily conducts heat or cold.
- Between November 1st and March 31st of any year, all structures must have a windbreak at the entrance and must contain a sufficient quantity of suitable, clean bedding material consisting of straw, cedar shavings or the equivalent and provide insulation appropriate to local climate conditions and sufficient to protect against cold and dampness. Hay, blankets, rags and other materials that retain moisture shall not be used for bedding.
- Between May 1st and October 31st of any year, all dogs must be afforded one or more areas of shade by natural or artificial means large enough to accommodate the entire body of the dog at one time to provide protection from the direct rays of the sun. Shaded area must be separate and outside of any shelter.

Defining what it means to be outside and unattended is key to these ordinances.

- “Outside and unattended,” for purposes of this section, shall mean any dog who is confined outdoors for a duration of longer than 15 minutes and not in visual range and physical presence of the owner. This expressly includes, but is not limited to, a dog in a securely fenced-in yard, a dog in a kennel or a dog tethered. For purposes of this section, a dog shall be considered “outside” regardless of access to an outdoor doghouse or similar structure.

Ideally, these ordinances will have meaningful fines and increasing penalties for repeat offenses. However, allowing a period before the law takes effect will help the community to adapt. Ideally, the city/county will offer a public education period during which there are efforts made to inform the public about the change in the law and provide warnings instead of citations. Warnings give enforcement agencies a chance to speak with owners, better understand what solutions are needed and give people time to work towards compliance. Law enforcement plays an important role in connecting owners to resources such as training and behavior information or programs that can help repair or build fences. The grace period should shorten as time goes on. Penalties should always be designed with the goal of motivating owners to care for their dogs, reserving removal of animals for serious cases.

**STEP SIX: GET COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

Enacting a local ordinance takes significant effort and requires testifying at town meetings, contacting council members to express support and informing others about the ordinance. Even in big cities, it can be common for very few people to get involved in local government (which means a small group of people is often changing laws and policies). Getting active community support can make or break the ordinance you are trying to pass.

Here are some ideas to spread the word and garner support for the ordinance:

- Create a sign-on letter to be distributed by your coalition.
- Local officials read local papers—schedule a meeting with editor or editorial board of your paper to ask them to support the proposal. Contact other media outlets to let them know about the efforts. Write letters to the editor for your paper (see sample language in the appendix), remembering to state your case concisely.
- Use social media, and encourage your coalition to do the same (see note below).
- Lobby local legislators. Prepare a fact sheet with key messages and be prepared with examples that you can provide to the community and those in decision-making positions. Set up appointments with government staff and distribute the fact sheet.
- Take advantage of extreme weather. During the sweltering heat of summer and the cruel chill of winter, our hearts and minds are with the animals kept outdoors. The upside of extreme weather events is that they offer an opportunity to highlight the need for more legislative protections. If you have an ordinance moving through the process, the weather can be a great motivator; it’s a great time to ask the

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community to reach out to their representatives in support of the ordinance.

If you have not yet introduced the ordinance:

- Reach out to local legislators, highlighting the need to improve the law.
- Engage your local humane society to ask if they might join you in approaching a policymaker.
- Contact media to ask that they remind people to bring their pets inside and call their attention to the need for enhanced legislation (or highlight a pending ordinance).
- Show your legislator news pieces celebrating animal welfare policy and highlight the opportunity to be recognized as a champion for the animals (pro-animal policy is smart politics—constituents care about pets!).

**Note: Using social media to garner support**

Social media has become a great way for your voice to be heard by elected officials. Twitter and Facebook specifically have created an avenue for concerned citizens to reach out to their legislators and have meaningful discussions. Often, the more popular the issue, the more likely elected officials will notice and feel compelled to act. Though it's not necessary to implement change, we've often seen success with the use of social media. If you're looking to use social media to reach your elected official, please consider the following:

**Facebook**

- Leave a comment on their public page. For example:
  - The tethering of dogs is a critical issue, with impacts on both animal welfare and human health and safety. Please support this ordinance, which protects citizens—human and canine alike—by contacting your legislator and asking them to support XXX.
  - [Legislator's name], please support ordinance XXX! Tethering is not conducive to the health and welfare of dogs and it poses a significant risk to communities. Policies to protect dogs who live outdoors are not only good for dogs, they are good for people.
- Include a relevant and tasteful (but compelling) photo in your posts, as this allows for an emotional reaction. Photos will also make your post stick out and garner more attention.
- Facebook best practices:
  - Post a comment on a recent post or directly to your elected official's Facebook page.
  - Be sure to tag your elected official in your comment.
  - Feel free to share alerts targeted to your specific ordinance from the main HSUS Facebook page.

**Twitter**

- Tweet at your elected official. You can find your legislator's Twitter handle on their website or by searching on Twitter. (Unsure whether it's their official account? Look for a verified account, which has a blue check mark.) For example:
  - Please help end dog chaining! <@your legislator's Twitter handle>
  - .<@your legislator's Twitter handle> Dogs are social animals; chaining them can contribute to aggression—please help end this!
  - Chaining dogs can result in strangulation or severe injury. Please help end this, <@your legislator's Twitter handle>!
  - Dogs should not be left outdoors in a blizzard! Help us #ProtectDogs. <@your legislator's Twitter handle>
- Twitter best practices:
  - Be sure to use a period “.” In front of the @ sign when tweeting directly to their handle, as your Tweet will then show up in the feeds of your followers. If there's text in front of their Twitter handle, there is no need to include the period.
  - Use only relevant hashtags to boost visibility and urgency of the campaign (e.g., #NoToChains and #YesOn456).
  - Share relevant tweets from the main HSUS Twitter page.

**STEP SEVEN: ATTEND PUBLIC MEETINGS AND TESTIFY IN SUPPORT**

A large and well-informed turnout at a town hall meeting or community forum is an extremely effective way to send a strong message to local officials, the media and the general public. If your official is in favor of a DWLO ordinance, a show of support helps to solidify his or her position. Your coalition may want to wear stickers or buttons or find some other way to indicate that you are all there in support of a common cause.

If your council calls a public meeting to discuss your proposal, you and members of your coalition should testify. As much as chronic chaining and exposure to the elements is harmful to dogs, you should spend equal time highlighting the ways that dogs who live outdoors affect the community. Ensure that comments are brief and concise and that everyone does not speak on the exact same points (a common challenge at public hearings). Some of the most imperative testimony will come from someone who will be tasked with enforcing the new ordinance. (See the appendix for sample testimony.)

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**STEP EIGHT: ANTICIPATE OPPOSITION AND COMPROMISE WHEN NEEDED**

Whether because of enforcement issues or strong opposition, you may have to compromise on your ordinance. Be prepared ahead of time. Know what parts of the ordinance are most important and what can be set aside, if needed. If possible, meet with members of the opposition to explore their concerns and whether any of them can be mitigated. And be sure your sponsor of the ordinance is prepared for likely opposition before it is introduced.

While every community is unique, the odds are that someone will oppose any kind of restriction on chaining or even enhancements to basic minimal standards.

**Note: The American Kennel Club**

While discussing opposition, we must address the American Kennel Club. Quite simply, the AKC is not an animal welfare organization. The AKC is a purebred dog registry sustained by registration fees. Because of their financial dependence on commercial breeders, the AKC regularly lobbies against basic animal welfare bills for fear that they might cut into dog registration fees. The organization also lobbies against state and local laws that it perceives might have an impact on breeders. While they present themselves as representatives of all dog owners, their extreme positions do not reflect the opinions of the majority of pet owners. The AKC or their affiliates/partners (who often have confusing names like “Responsible Dog Owners of <State>”) are very likely to express public opposition to your ordinance. Many people misunderstand the mission of the AKC and for that reason, they are effective. But they should be confronted directly about their history of anti-animal lobbying. For more detailed information, see [humanesociety.org/news/akc-worst-show](http://humanesociety.org/news/akc-worst-show).

**STEP NINE: REGROUP AFTER A SETBACK OR CELEBRATE YOUR VICTORY!**

You may not win the first time around, but do not give up! Perhaps your council is not yet ready for a DWLO ordinance. Talk to individuals who voted against it and find out why. You can learn from this experience and try again.

If your ordinance passes, congratulations! This is a significant accomplishment and you should be very proud of your hard work. Once the ordinance passes, stay in touch with your enforcement agency to see how you can help get the word out. Use billboards, informational door hangers, social media and news outlets. You can also distribute flyers to raise awareness about your exciting new ordinance (see the sample in the appendix).



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## Appendices

### Supportive quotes

- “Animal control professionals and law enforcement officers are already overextended during this historic winter weather and [bringing dogs inside during extreme weather] is something simple you can do to help ease that burden.”  
–John Thompson, Executive Director, National Animal Control Association
- “The law requires owners to protect their pets from the elements and gives law enforcement tools to ensure the safety and health of an animal, including the ability in certain circumstances to seize an animal to ensure its safety.”  
–Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring
- “Our experience in enforcing the Animal Welfare Act has led us to conclude that continuous confinement of dogs by a tether is inhumane. A tether significantly restricts the dog’s movement. A tether can also become tangled around or hooked on the dog’s shelter structure or other objects, further restricting the dog’s movement and potentially causing injury.”  
–The Federal Register Vol. 1, No. 68, United States Department of Agriculture
- “Tethering is an unacceptable method of confinement for any animal and has no place in humane sheltering. Constant tethering of dogs in lieu of a primary enclosure is not a humane practice.”  
–The Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, Association of Shelter Veterinarians
- “It can take just minutes for a dog or cat to freeze to death when temperatures dip below freezing. If it’s too cold for you, it’s probably too cold for them, too.”  
–Chelsea Rider, Director, National Sheriffs’ Association’s National Law Enforcement Center on Animal Abuse
- Research conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that chained dogs are 2.8 times more likely to bite than non-chained dogs. That number increases to 5.4 times more likely to bite children under the age of 12. Chained dogs often become very defensive of their territory and protective of their small area.
- “When confronted with a perceived threat, dogs respond according to their fight-or-flight instinct. A chained dog, unable to take flight, often feels forced to fight, and attacks any unfamiliar animal or person who wanders into his or her territory.”  
–The Public Safety and Humane Implications of Persistently Tethering Domestic Dogs, New Mexico Department of Public Safety
- The 2017 State Farm report for dog-related injury claims reports paying 3,618 individual claims totaling a cost of more than \$132 million. State Farm writes, “It is true that animal behaviorists, veterinarians, and others in the animal welfare space acknowledge that tethered dogs are often frustrated, not properly socialized, and have an increased potential to bite or attack people. Our messaging is that dogs should be supervised at all times by an adult and children should never be left alone with any dog, including in the family home or yard. Responsible pet ownership is the key to reducing dog-related injuries and that includes being present with your dog.”
- “Never tether or chain your dog because this can contribute to aggressive behavior.” American Veterinary Medical Association

**Sample letters to the editor**

The recent dog attack in [location] illustrates one of the major problems that results from tethering dogs for long periods of time (article name, date of story). According to one study, tethered dogs are nearly three times more likely to bite than dogs who are not kept tethered. Despite this obvious danger, many pet owners still keep their dogs tied outside.

Dogs who live tied up outside suffer from extreme isolation. Initial periods of boredom and loneliness later become territorial and aggressive behavior. The lack of socialization creates fearful dogs who act quickly and fiercely to defend their territory from all intruders, including other animals, people and even small children.

If [location] wants to prevent future dog attacks, an ordinance should be passed to regulate dog tethering.

It's great to see that location is considering an ordinance that would enhance protections for dogs who live outdoors (article name, date of story). Many dogs who live outdoors lack even basic, minimal standards of care.

The majority of states have communities with ordinances that prohibit, set time limits or set care standards for dogs. By adding these protections, [location] is moving in the right direction toward making our community safer for humans and pets alike.

**Sample flyer**

**New dog tethering ordinance in effect**

Drafted and supported by a broad coalition, the new law provides animal control and other law enforcement officers with an important tool to address public safety and animal welfare problems presented by chronically chained dogs in [location]. The new law, which went into effect on (date), will:

- [List the requirements under the new code]

**Tethering and chaining is unsafe for dogs and the community.**

A dog on a chain is often lonely and isolated, which can exacerbate a host of behavioral problems. The continuous chaining or tethering of a dog is a key contributor to poor socialization, as dogs chained long-term tend to bark excessively and can suffer great psychological damage, leading to anxiety and aggression. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Veterinary Medical Association warn that chained dogs are significantly more likely to bite. Chained dogs are more likely to seek escape—and if successful, run at large—and pose a threat to themselves and the public. Chains catch on objects and can prevent dogs from reaching their food, water or shelter. The new ordinance will help protect dogs from the risk of injury and strangulation.

**The ordinance offers clear standards of care for dog owners.**

The new law outlines specifically what is required for the care of dogs in [location], offering proactive steps to prevent animal suffering and legal trouble for citizens.

**The ordinance gives officers a valuable tool for enforcement.**

Regulating the tethering of dogs and upgrading care standards will give animal control and law enforcement officers an important opportunity to educate dog owners on proper care, providing law enforcement with more certain, consistent and enforceable minimum care standards. In short, this new ordinance is a mechanism to elevate the standard of care for dogs living outside most hours of the day.

We anticipate that the regulation of chaining or tethering will reduce both the high volume of calls to animal control and law enforcement regarding the concerns over chained dogs and complaints from neighbors over constant barking, running at large and other undesirable behaviors of tethered dogs.

**Community support**

[Promote local groups who would be willing and able to support families who want to unchain their dog by building fences, etc.]

**Q&A: Common questions and concerns**

Below are a few of the common arguments against DWLO ordinances, and some responses.

- *“We are a country founded on freedom and personal rights; don’t tell me how to raise my dog.”* Part of our social contract is to accept laws that are for the common good, and one of our shared values is the humane treatment of animals. We must consider all of the financial aspects of caring for a pet when determining if pet ownership is a good idea. In short, these laws are part of our social contract.
- *“A tether doesn’t mean a dog is neglected. A dog could be just as neglected behind a fence. Removing chaining won’t stop neglect, and we already have laws for that.”* A tethering ordinance will not solve every dog problem in your community overnight, but it is part of a long-term solution. Chained dogs are taxing to a community, and we all pay the costs. It is important to remember that tethered dogs are more likely to bite and attack than are dogs living behind fences, because tethering restricts natural behaviors and leaves the dog exposed.
- *“What about the elderly lady who ties her dog to the front porch while she is gardening?”* This type of situation is an exception your ordinance should exempt. Additionally, as this is a complaint-driven ordinance, very few people are going to complain to enforcement agencies about this woman, and even if they did, officers would be able to see that this situation is not dire or in need of correction. Law enforcement is empowered to know the difference between a cruel situation and one where people just need a little support and information.
- *“This ordinance will flood the shelters.”* Ordinances should be designed to improve conditions for dogs who live outdoors, but the goal should be keeping pets in their homes when possible. Working with owners to reach compliance is the goal, and the citation/seizure options should only be employed when education is ineffective. This type of ordinance is complaint-driven, so there might be an increase in calls in the beginning, but they tend to even out and eventually reduce the number of reports to law enforcement. Rather than being a burden on animal control officer, it will help create long-term change in the community by raising pet-keeping standards.

- *“What about people who can’t afford a fence?”* Often, education and resources are the solution to a dog living at the end of a chain or being kept outdoors. More and more communities have fence-building coalitions and groups like Pets for Life who provide services and fences free of charge for families. Fences for Fido, for example, also offers resources for advocates, including supply lists, fence-building instructions, etc. Working with these groups will help mitigate some of these concerns and keep dogs with their people whenever possible.
- *“What about escape artists? This is the only way to confine my dog.”* There is often a solution available for these dogs. For example, law enforcement and/or volunteer groups might help citizens bury their fence to prevent digging, extend the length of wire at the top of the fence or install roller bars to prevent jumping.



# Our Promise

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**We fight the big fights to end suffering for all animals.**

Together with millions of supporters, we take on puppy mills, factory farms, trophy hunts, animal testing and other cruel industries. With our affiliates, we rescue and care for thousands of animals every year through our animal rescue team's work and other hands-on animal care services.

We fight all forms of animal cruelty to achieve the vision behind our name: a humane society.  
And we can't do it without you.



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