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Bill to Allow Regulation of Dog Breeds Advances

- If made law, it would let cities require spaying and neutering of types such as pit bulls.

By Jordan Rau, Times Staff Writer

SACRAMENTO — Spurred by a recent rash of pit bull attacks on children in California, state lawmakers voted Monday to give local governments authority to require the spaying and neutering of specific dog breeds.

San Francisco — where 12-year-old Nicholas Faibish was mauled to death in June by a family pit bull — is poised to become the first part of the state to approve such an ordinance. Mayor Gavin Newsom had requested the bill, which passed the state Assembly 46 to 18. The measure still requires approval by the Senate and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, but San Francisco is already drafting its new rules in anticipation of passage.

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While some places, including Denver, have banned pit bulls California is one of a handful of states that prohibit cities and counties from singling out specific breeds for regulation. The did not change even after Diane Whipple, a 33-year-old lacrosse coach, was killed by two Presa Canario dogs in Sa Francisco in 2001.

Breeders and some pet advocates have long resisted restrictions on specific breeds out of fear that it would lead to a wholesale ban on controversial types of animals.


But pressure to do something mounted this year after several highly publicized attacks around the Bay Area, including in San Francisco and Santa Rosa, where an 8-year-old girl, Annette Rojas, was nearly killed by a pit bull, also in June. On Monday, a Monterey County toddler was hospitalized with puncture wounds after being attacked by a loose pit bull while he was outside playing in a yard.

"This will make a huge difference in the cities and counties that elect to adopt" ordinances, said Jennifer Fearing, president of United Animal Nations, a Sacramento-based animal protection group. But, she said, "it's definitely not a complete answer to the dangerous problem. It does not address what's motivating people to create dangerous dogs in the first place."

Forty-seven people have died from dog bites in California between 1965 and 2001, the most in the nation, according to a task force Newsom appointed to deal with the problem. The task force said pit bulls and then Rottweilers caused the most deaths in one 20-year period, followed by German shepherds, huskies, Doberman pinschers, chows, Great




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Danes and Saint Bernards.

Carl Friedman, director of San Francisco's Department of Animal Care and Control, said backyard breeders sell pit bulls for \$400 to \$600 each, but the dogs often end up in the pound.

"We just can't find homes for them, and they're being euthanized," he said.

The legislation, SB 861 by Sen. Jackie Speier (D-Hillsborough), was supported by Los Angeles and San Diego counties and a number of prominent animal groups, including the Humane Society, but some opponents insist the approach is misplaced.

"The problem we have is not with our dogs but with our dog owners," said Assemblywoman Audra Strickland (R-Thousand Oaks). "There are a significant number of dog owners who abuse their dogs and condition them to fight and become vicious. Those people are the culprits."

Others said the measure did not go far enough.

"It's time to get rid of these pit bulls," said Assemblyman Tim Leslie (R-Tahoe City). "I think we ought to string 'em all up, send them to some other state."

Times staff writer Nancy Vogel and the Associated Press contributed to this report.

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