

Vicious dog bill introduced in Ohio House but victims say it's not enough

By **Laura A. Bischoff**
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Two Democrats in the Ohio House are proposing minor changes to the state's dangerous dog laws but victims of serious attacks say it falls short of what's needed.

A dog would be quarantined for 10 days following an attack and wardens would be required to determine if the dog can safely remain in a community, if it can be retrained at the owners' expense or if euthanasia is warranted, under [House Bill 241](#).

Dog wardens would make recommendations, and a court would make the final decision, under the bill cosponsored by Reps. Cecil Thomas of Cincinnati and Meredith Lawson-Rowe of Reynoldsburg.

State Rep. Kevin Miller, R-Newark, is working on a separate dog bill but he has yet to introduce [his plan](#). Thomas and Lawson-Rowe said they are willing to work with Miller on the issues.

Lawmakers are working to reform Ohio's dangerous dog laws following [publication of a nine-month investigation](#) by The Columbus Dispatch, Cincinnati Enquirer, Akron Beacon Journal and Canton Repository.

The investigation found victims of dog attacks suffer devastating injuries, severe psychological trauma and crushing medical bills. At the same time, Ohio law fails to impose serious penalties for dog owners, even when their pet maims or disfigures someone.

"It was so educational. It let me know there is a lot of work to be done to protect our citizens from dangerous dogs," said Lawson-Rowe.

Drew Russell is the mom of Avery Russell, now 12, who was disfigured in a dog attack in June and attorney Rex Elliott represents the family

of [Jo Ann Echelbarger](#) who was fatally mauled. Both Russell and Elliott said House Bill 241 falls short.

Russell said retraining and rehabilitation shouldn't be an option for dogs that kill or nearly kill humans.

After reading the bill, Elliott said "So a dog can kill without provocation and the dog warden after investigation has the discretion to release the dog back to its owner? This bill doesn't do enough."

Echelbarger, 73, died a violent, gruesome death when her next-door neighbors' dogs attacked her as she was gardening on a patio between their condos. One of the two pit bulls had been deemed dangerous by the Pickaway County dog warden due to a previous attack that injured another neighbor and killed her puppy.