

MICHIGAN

Bill requires dog owners to stay at scene of biting incidents

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LANSING, Mich. -- A state lawmaker wants to stop the canine equivalent of the hit-and-run, proposing criminal penalties for dog owners who flee the scene after their dogs bite other people.

The legislation, set to be approved Wednesday by a House panel, would make it a misdemeanor to leave the scene of a dog-biting incident, punishable by up to 93 days in jail and a \$500 fine.

Rep. Jeff Mayes says he sponsored the bill after a Bay City woman complained that a pit bull had attacked her and her little dog on a sidewalk, and the pit bull's owner drove away.

"Good people are going to do the right thing," said Mayes, a Democrat from Bay City. "This law is for people who don't make the right decision and put people at risk by leaving."

The bill also would require an owner to help an injured bite victim and say whether the dog has received legally required vaccinations.

Mayes says most dog owners stay at the scene of biting incidents. But after introducing a similar bill in 2005, he learned of another case in which an 8-year-old boy was bitten by a dog in the Saginaw area.

"Instead of offering the boy help, the people just took the dog and went. No one knew whether the dog had the appropriate shots," Mayes said.

Bite victims can file civil lawsuits against dog owners. But Mayes says criminal prosecution should be an option as well.

His bill passed the House Judiciary Committee in September 2006 but didn't clear the full House, which Mayes said was because lawmakers ran out of time in the two-year legislative session.

Dogs bite more than 4.7 million people a year in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About 800,000 Americans seek medical attention for dog bites each year, half of them children.