

Vicious dogs require a law with bite

March 16, 2007

Not a month goes by, it seems, when you don't read a story about a pit bull attacking a child or young adult. Last month, a 5-year-old South Side girl named Zaria Junius was mauled by one on her way to school. Following from in these cases, some people cried out for a ban on pit bulls while others argued it isn't the dog that's to blame -- that these are lovable creatures -- but the owners for abusing or poorly controlling them.

We're resistant to testimony about the charms of pit bulls. We've seen the snarling bloodlust with which even the most happily domesticated ones strain to get at another canine. But we agree legislation to deal with this problem shouldn't be breed-specific, as Ald. Ginger Rugai (19th) has proposed, or aimed at any grouping of "dangerous" dogs. It should, as Mayor Daley proposes in a new ordinance, target owners whose negligence puts innocents in harm's way.

The ordinance would subject these owners to a fine as high as \$5,000 and a jail term as long as six months. That's a steep upgrade from the current penalty, which ranges from a \$100 to \$300 fine. The public will continue to be protected by measures requiring dogs with vicious potential to be fenced, insured and muzzled in public. For all that, we suggest people don't think twice about indulging in canine profiling: When you see a pit bull, go in the opposite direction, especially if you're with your kids.