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Contact: Melia Carter

708-224-1900

Chicago Leads Nation to Unite against Dog Fighting!
*Community Activists, Animal Advocates and Government Leaders
Launch Safe, Humane Chicago Initiative*

CHICAGO, IL –In one of the most extensive community-wide partnerships to address violence in the context of dog fighting, the Dog Advisory Work Group (D.A.W.G.), the Alliance for Community Peace, the Chicago Police Department, and other city agencies, organizations and community advocates gathered last week to announce the Safe, Humane Chicago initiative – an aggressive citywide campaign to reduce the abhorrent practice of dog fighting and other associated violence.

In cities across the nation, dog fighters and animal abusers are some of the most violent offenders in the criminal justice system. Animal abusers are more likely to commit child abuse, domestic violence and other violent acts against humans. In most cases, children exposed to the ruthless violence of dog fighting and animal abuse at a very young age become desensitized to violence, resulting in children more likely to grow up and become violent themselves.

“Bottom line, the real victim of dog fighting is society,” said Steve Dale, author of the twice-weekly national column “My Pet World” and host of two nationally syndicated radio programs on animal issues. “Safe, Humane Chicago is the perfect beginning to what needs to happen all around America. We need the public to understand the reality of this violence and call for it to end.”

With the recent media attention surrounding the Michael Vick case, activists warned against stereotyping dog fighters as people of a certain race or culture because data shows that the only commonality that exists among dog fighters is the predisposition to engage in violence.

“Whether you like dogs or not, this issue is about violence in our communities – and we must put an end to the senseless torture of living creatures and the psychological scars that dog fighting leaves on the kids that witness this brutality,” said Reverend Dr. Walter B. Johnson, Jr., executive director for the Alliance for Community Peace. “To protect our children, we are calling on the community to get involved to make our streets safer. We cannot just look the other way and let our children become recruits for the gang bangers to mold into violent criminals.”

A study by the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and Boston's Northeastern University shows that those who attend dog fights and witness other forms of animal cruelty are five times more likely to commit violent crimes against people.

"In Chicago, data shows that 70% of dog-fighting and animal abuse offenders have also been arrested for violent felonies against people. Even more alarming is that 86% of those who have committed crimes against animals have been arrested for multiple violent offenses," said Cynthia Bathurst, executive director of D.A.W.G. "Through education, early intervention and community involvement, we believe that we can significantly reduce violence in general by focusing on violence associated with dog fighting. This will create a more humane generation in the years to come."

To achieve this goal, the Safe, Humane Chicago initiative builds alliances between local government, animal and community advocates, humane organizations and the faith-based community. These alliances will partner to conduct animal education programs for both adults and children; develop youth intervention programs to stop these violent crimes before they are committed; work with the criminal justice system; and create open communication lines for community members to report dog fighting and animal abuse crimes to trusted allies that will assist law enforcement in stopping the violence. The program will also teach adults and children the appropriate tools for safe interaction with dogs to avoid bites and attacks. Once established, this program is poised to become a model for other cities.

"Violence and cruelty is a problem of the entire community, and when communities come together with such a broad-based initiative, everyone benefits," said Marie Belew Wheatley, president and CEO of the American Humane Association. "Safe, Humane Chicago is an approach that we believe will serve as a prototype for other cities across the nation."

Dog Advisory Working Group (D.A.W.G.) is a coalition of individuals and organizations working together to improve conditions for people and companion animals and to help build safe, humane communities.