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The punishment

All those involved can be penalized

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Dogfighting is a crime in Illinois that is punishable by up to three years in jail for a first offense.

The law not only applies to fight organizers but also to breeders, trainers, promoters and spectators—all of whom are subject to punishment if they are convicted.

Last year, the Illinois General Assembly passed new provisions that aim to muzzle dogfights by approving harsher penalties for dogfight spectators. The law also allows courts to presume that dogfighting has occurred if a person is caught with a dog and dogfighting equipment such as a "rape stand," used to hold aggressive dogs in place to breed more dogs for fights.

Before these provisions took effect in January, it was difficult to make a dogfighting charge stick because police rarely witness the fights, according to Chicago police and Cynthia Bathurst of Chicago's Dog Advisory Work Group, a community coalition that serves as a court advocate for abused animals.

People instead were given a lesser charge of animal cruelty, punishable by up to one year in jail. "In a given year, we followed close to 200 cases of cruel treatment," Bathurst said. "Over half have something to do with dogfighting."

Under Illinois law, penalties for a first offense:

>> Owning, capturing, breeding, training or leasing any dog bound for a fight is punishable by up to three years in jail.

>> Promoting, conducting, advertising or collecting money for a dog battle is punishable by up to three years in jail.

>> Attending a dogfight is punishable by up to one year in jail.

>> Bringing a child younger than 13 years old to a dogfight is punishable by up to three years in jail.

>> Any Illinois veterinarian presented with a dog suspected of engaging in a fight is required to

file a report with the state and provide the dog owners' names and descriptions of the animals involved. Subsequent offenses carry harsher penalties.