

January 8th, 2007

Dear Play at the Park

On an annual basis, our Emergency Department sees nearly 50,000 children. An important number of these emergency room visits are precipitated by children being attacked or assaulted by dogs many of which are off-leash.

The Department of Paediatrics at The Hospital for Sick Children strongly recommends that The City of Toronto implement sound, well thought out public policy that would facilitate the cohabitation of people and dogs in Toronto's urban environment.

In addition to the physical confrontation with off-leash dogs, there is the broader question of access to parks. With the changing landscape of Toronto, we need to develop public policies that would minimize the opportunities for conflicts between dogs and children. Children and youth need to have safe spaces to play without the anxiety of having to negotiate off leash dogs.

We would encourage the creation of safe and properly maintained enclosures for dogs in large parks or spaces where there are limited opportunities for conflict. It might be prudent to ask the Department of Public Health to conduct annual reviews of these enclosures to ensure that they are properly managed.

We would encourage proper enforcement mechanisms requiring dogs to be licensed and vaccinated.

We appreciate that this issue creates many challenges to local politicians as they try and navigate their way to sound public policy on this issue. We also understand the important roles pets play in the lives of children and adults alike. We believe one of the ways to successfully meet these challenges would be for the City to minimize, through sound and consistent policy, the chances of people, especially children, being attacked by Off Leash dogs. If necessary, we would be prepared to assist further on this issue if required in the pursuit of sound public policy on this issue.

Sincerely,



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