

ANIMALS NEED RESPONSIBLE OWNERS, NOT GUARDIANS

Animal rights activists believe that animals should have the same rights and privileges as humans. One way they seek to do this is by pushing for changes to how laws classify animals, including using legal terms that usually only apply to people. This includes use of the term “guardian” instead of “owner”. While this sounds benevolent, the term “guardian” actually has legal meanings that could pose risks to owners and their ability to protect their animals.

LAWS ALREADY PROTECT ANIMALS

Since its beginnings, the American legal system has classified animals as the property of their owners and created unique protections for them. In practice, these traditions have resulted in a stable legal system that clearly protects animals by defining the rights and responsibilities of owners and others in the animal care chain, like veterinarians. For example, animal owners are legally responsible for providing appropriate care, humane conditions, and safety measures. They are legally liable if their animal becomes a public nuisance, poses a danger, or causes the injury or death to another animal or a person. Current laws also protect against animal theft and respect shared ownership rights.



GUARDIANS ARE USED BY COURTS TO PROTECT PEOPLE, NOT ANIMALS

A guardian is someone who is specially trained and appointed by a court to be legally responsible for a person who is unable to manage their own affairs, like a person who has been declared incompetent or a child whose parental relationships have ended.

WORDS MATTER

Ownership of an animal confers rights and responsibilities upon owners. The term “guardian” diminishes the rights and responsibilities of animal ownership. A better approach to assure proper care is to strengthen and enforce existing animal cruelty laws to address those who treat their dogs in an inhumane manner, and expand public education efforts to teach dog owners how to properly care for their pets.



The American Kennel Club (AKC) urges against calling oneself a “guardian” when referring to the keeping of dogs. Doing so may reduce the legal classification and value of dogs as property, which would restrict the rights of owners, veterinarians, and government agencies to protect and care for dogs. It could also provide the basis for a vast increase in the number of frivolous and expensive lawsuits being filed, which would result in higher costs for pet care. The term guardian does nothing to promote more responsible treatment of dogs.

To learn more, visit www.akcgr.org/akc/guardian

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