

Fate Of Dog In Arizona Mauling To Be Decided

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Posted on : 2014/3/25 4:26:01

PHOENIX (AP) -- It is a legal case that has attracted a team of top death penalty lawyers, candlelight vigils and a polarizing Internet debate on mercy, blame and animal violence.



The source of the dispute is a pit bull that mauled a 4-year-old boy last month as he and a friend were playing in a yard. The attack left Kevin Vicente with a broken eye socket and jaw, and the boy has months, if not years, of reconstructive surgery ahead of him.

The case moves to a Phoenix courtroom Tuesday as a judge hears arguments on whether Mickey should live or die, a question that has riled up thousands of animal lovers on social media.

Guadalupe Villa, one of the adults at the scene, filed the vicious-dog court petition that started the case. In her petition, she describes Mickey as a dog that has a history of acting without provocation and that killed one of her dogs.

Animal advocates have hit back, saying both the dog and boy are victims and the baby sitter watching the child was negligent in letting him play near the animal. They also argue the owner was fostering aggression by keeping the dog chained up.

Pit bulls are viewed by some as a dangerous breed, a reputation their fans dispute.

Those hoping to rescue Mickey have taken their cause to Facebook, where a "Save Mickey" page has garnered more than 59,000 likes. The dog's supporters recently used social media to organize a candlelight vigil and even a YouTube video plea.

"This is not Kevin versus Mickey," said attorney John Schill, one of three attorneys representing the dog in the court petition. "Having Mickey killed is not going to take away Kevin's pain or injuries. The only thing this is going to do is kill a poor, innocent dog."

Schill is working pro bono at the request of The Lexus Project, a New York-based nonprofit that has been raising money for a legal defense fund for the dog.

Support for Mickey intensified after an employee at the Maricopa County Animal Control and Care Center, which has custody of the dog, wrote on Facebook that Mickey was "going night night."

Melissa Gable, a center spokeswoman, said the employee will face administrative action but declined to elaborate.

The dog has been living in a cage away from other animals and from public view. According to Gable, that hasn't stopped some people from showing up and trying to see him. The facility has also received numerous phone calls from people pleading against euthanizing him.

"We have said if the court deems that Mickey should not be euthanized, we are working to find an appropriate outlet for him," Gable said. "We're trying to do what we can, but we're just the bad guy in this situation."

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Meanwhile, support in the form of donations and gifts from around the world have come in for Kevin since the dog bit the boy in the face on Feb. 20.

Floralma Vicente, the boy's mother, had to quit her job as a motel housekeeper to care for him, according to The Arizona Republic. A single mother with two other children back in her native Guatemala, Vicente said she is grateful for the outpouring of public support. But she can't understand the support that has emerged for the dog.

"It disturbed me at first that they placed more value on an animal than on a child, and that made me feel very bad," Vicente told the Republic through a Spanish interpreter. "If they don't care about (Kevin), well, I do."