

Low-income communities feel effect of new law prohibiting dog chains

In first four months of rules, animal control has received more than 875 reports of possible violations.

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When two tickets came in the mail, Dianna Routt said, she wasn't surprised.

Animal control officers had been stopping by her aunt's house on Chicon Street in East Austin regularly to see whether Bobby, Routt's 75-pound pit bull, was on a chain. The day that animal control took Bobby, he was on a chain, she said, because Routt's aunt was waiting for the mail and Meals on Wheels and More to make a delivery.

"Now I'm out of maybe \$1,000 for these fines," said Routt, a 32-year-old customer service representative. "Yeah, I'm still mad. I want to take it to trial."

During the first four months that the city's rules prohibiting dogs from being left unattended on outdoor chains and tethers were in effect, the city received 875 calls about possible violations. The result has been 98 citations, with a potential fine of up to \$500 for each misdemeanor charge.

When the city ordinance was being discussed, East Austin activists said poor families would be unfairly targeted. They noted that dogs are often chained because fencing is expensive and that keeping dogs tethered is as much an issue of cultural difference as one of humane treatment.

An American-Statesman analysis of city records shows that the ZIP codes that drew the most calls about possible violations correspond with some of the city's poorest areas.

East Austin ZIP code 78702, which had a median household income of \$23,348 in 2000, had the most calls: 133. That was about 15 percent of all calls from the date the law went into effect, Oct. 1, to Feb. 6.

<http://www.statesman.com/news/content/news/stories/local/03/03/0303dogchain.html>