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BAD NEWZ KENNELS AND LEGAL ISSUES IN ANIMAL ABUSE CASES SUBJECT OF AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION SEMINAR

Program will study the impact of the Michael Vick case for prosecuting and representing animal abusers and caring for the victims

CHICAGO, Aug. 27, 2008 – When law enforcement found 49 abused pit bull terriers in a raid on football star Michael Vick's Bad Newz Kennels, they faced many challenges. Were the dogs suitable for adoption and training? Who would oversee the process to determine the health and well-being of the dogs? How should prosecutors charge those who fostered dog fighting? How should lawyers defend a high-profile defendant? When does inhumane treatment of dogs lead to major federal charges? How will the proceedings in this case impact future cruelty cases?

These issues and more will be addressed on Sept. 19 during the Animal Law Committee of the American Bar Association Tort Trial & Insurance Practice Section's program, ***"Prosecuting and Representing Animal Abusers and Caring for the Victims – The Michael Vick Case and Its Impact on Cruelty Cases,"*** at DePaul University College of Law in Chicago.

The day-long program will feature prosecutors, defense lawyers, forensic veterinarians, academics, animal rights advocates, health professionals and those knowledgeable in the growing area of animal law who will examine the implications and lessons learned from the Michael Vick case. Additionally, lawyers directly involved in the case will be on hand to outline their first-hand knowledge to help explain this complex and troubling case.

While news of the case has died down, and the defendants have been prosecuted and convicted, concern in the animal community for the welfare of the dogs continues. The Vick case will be used as an example of how the government can marshal resources and seek solutions in a difficult situation.

Among the special presentations being made at the conference are:

- Prof. Rebecca Huss of Valparaiso University School of Law will speak of her responsibilities in *Lessons Learned as a Special Master/Guardian of the Vick Dogs*;
- Dr. Melinda Merck of the ASPCA will address *Forensic Veterinary Medicine at Work*;
- *Prosecuting the Michael Vick Case*, will feature Brian Whisler, former supervisory assistant U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia;
- *Defending a Dog Fighting Case* with Claire Caldwell, a lawyer for one of the co-defendants in the case; and
- *The Importance of Court Advocacy Programs in Cruelty Prosecution*, program closing remarks from Cynthia Bathurst, Best Friends Animal Society and Dog Advocacy Work Group of Chicago.

Panel discussions include:

- *Evaluating and Caring for the Victims – Where Are They Now?* Speakers include Dr. Pam Reed, ASPCA; Donna Reynolds and Tim Racer of Bay Area Doglovers Responsible About Pit Bulls; and Francis Battista of Best Friends Animal Society; and
- *Prosecuting Animal Cruelty Cases*. Panelists include Assistant State's Attorney Amy Maher, Madison County, Ill.; K. Michelle Welch, Virginia Attorney General's Office; and Jennifer Cifaldi, assistant state's attorney, Adams County, Ill.

The program moderator will be Elise (Ledy) VanKavage, chair-elect of the TIPS Animal Law Committee,

and senior director of legal training and legislation for the ASPCA in Maryville, Ill.

The program is cosponsored by other committees of the section, the ABA Criminal Justice Section, Valparaiso University School of Law, the Animal Farm Foundation, the National Canine Research Council, Best Friends Animal Society, the Animal Welfare Institute, PetSmart Charities and DePaul University College of Law.

A full schedule for the meeting, including a list of speakers, is available at <http://www.abanet.org/tips/>.

The ABA Tort Trial & Insurance Practice Section is the only national professional group to bring together plaintiffs' lawyers, defense lawyers and insurance and corporate counsel for the exchange of information and ideas. The section has more than 35,000 members and 34 general committees that focus on substantive and procedural matters in areas including aviation and space law, fidelity and surety law, medical malpractice, transportation law and others.

With more than 413,000 members, the American Bar Association is the largest voluntary professional membership organization in the world. As the national voice of the legal profession, the ABA works to improve the administration of justice, promotes programs that assist lawyers and judges in their work, accredits law schools, provides continuing legal education, and works to build public understanding around the world of the importance of the rule of law.

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Editors Note: *Reporters are invited to cover sessions at the TIPS Animal Law Committee program free of charge. Media credentials can be obtained by contacting Deborah Weixl, ABA Division for Media Relations and Communication Services, at 312/988-6126 or e-mail weixld@staff.abanet.org. On site call 847/902-9019. Speakers will be available for interviews by contacting the ABA.*

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