

From: Marybeth [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, January 2, 2023 6:46 PM
To: Torres, Michael Angelo (DPH - Contractor) <michaelangelo.torres@sfdph.org>
Subject: Opposition to legislation banning e-collars

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Dear Commissioner Torres,

I am writing to voice my opposition to the proposed legislation banning the use of e-collars in San Francisco.

I write from the perspective of a:

- Rescue dog owner (not a professional trainer)
- Supporter and volunteer at a local animal rescue
- Supporter of Animal Welfare organizations
- Supporter of U.C. Davis School of Medicine
- Cyclist (I ride on trails and open spaces with my dog)
- An equestrian (I have conditioned sport horses on trails)
- Hiker and backpacker (my dog is always with me)

In my opinion, an e-collar is a valuable training tool that I became familiar with my most recent dog which is a cattledog mix rescue.

He is 7 years old and I adopted him at 1 year.

I have worked with a trainer ever since I adopted my dog. Though I am not a professional, my dog and I have mastered high level behaviors and tricks using positive reinforcement and rewards. In 2019 my dog performed with the ODC professional dance troupe in their Summer Dance Festival - Canine Comfort. Last year we were invited to perform tricks on a TV show hosted by Sarah Silverman. It will air this year. My dog has also competed in AKC Rally classes placing first.

If positive reinforcement has gotten my dog so far, why then do I consider e-collars to be a valuable training tool? Because, there are safety and emergency situations where positive reinforcement is not effective. I hike with my dog off leash where it is allowed and I want him to be well mannered and safe around horses, livestock and wildlife. As an equestrian and cyclist I am serious about trail manners and the safety of others as well as my dog. I also believe that dogs are happiest and healthiest if they are allowed to be off leash. I had a problem, though my dog has a good recall. I was unable to recall if a coyote ran across the trail or was spotted in the distance. Because this was not a scenario I could predict or repeat, I could not redirect his attention and reward. It happens too fast! I consulted our trainer and he suggested an e-collar. We had never used one and knew I needed training. We went out together in the field so I could be properly trained in a real life situation. After that lesson and subsequent hikes and coyote sightings I was able to effectively prevent my dog from chasing coyotes and wildlife. My dog is now trained and is also now reliable around livestock which makes him a model citizen. My dog was never hurt by the e-collar because it was used correctly. My dog is happy, healthy and relaxed. He has a great life and can enjoy appropriate freedoms safely because he had this e-collar training.

I applaud you for advocating for the welfare of animals however, I believe that banning an effective and safe training tool will only do more harm than good. There are situations where positive reinforcement alone is not effective. For the safety and happiness of so many deserving dogs, I ask that you oppose the legislation to ban the use of e-collars.

Sincerely,
Marybeth [REDACTED]

From: Jessica [REDACTED]

Sent: Monday, January 9, 2023 4:49 PM

To: Torres, Michael Angelo (DPH - Contractor) <michaelangelo.torres@sfdph.org>

Subject: Feedback on Proposed E-Collar Ban Legislation from a Concerned SF Resident

This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

Dear SF Commission of Animal Control and Welfare,

I hope your day is going well. I am a current resident of District 6 and wanted to reach out as I was made aware of a potential dog e-collar ban in the city of San Francisco. I am strongly opposed to this proposed blanket ban legislation and would like to share my own experience using this training tool.

I have been a San Francisco resident for over 6 years now and a dog owner for over 2 years. I adopted my rescue dog Twila in October 2020. She is a Formosan Mountain Dog mix from Taiwan (basically street dogs of Taiwan). Given her background and as is common for Taiwan Dog rescues (and village dog/street dogs in general), she is extremely fearful. Her biggest triggers are any kind of sudden loud noise (e.g. fireworks) or busy streets/intersections, both of which are common in San Francisco.

After her adoption, we immediately bonded and she is extremely attached as well as loyal to me. However, we struggled with her fearfulness for the first year we had her. During the first year we completed 2 courses of positive-reinforcement-only training and while she is very smart to pick up any command inside the apartment, we made no progress whatsoever outside as her triggers are omnipresent here in the city. It is common for Formosan Mountain Dogs to possess little food motivation as well as being flight risks due to skittishness. When Twila is in her most fearful state outside, she will not usually take any treats whatsoever, including boiled chicken breast, string cheese, and other high value foods (I have tried everything under the sun like cooked hot dogs). Positive-reinforcement training grew extremely frustrating as I was taught in the training classes to reward, but there was nothing to positively reinforce during our walks while she was so scared. I gave up hope that she could ever go off-leash and live the fulfilling life she deserved. I felt helpless whenever we had to go outside and had no idea how to provide Twila with the support she needed. We had hit a wall in our relationship.

At the beginning of 2022, I sought the help of a balanced trainer that had a proven track record with fearful rescue dogs such as Twila. Through a series of 1:1 private training sessions, she introduced the e-collar to us. Balanced training as a whole was life-changing. Through working with a balanced trainer, she showed me how to provide structure and to communicate clearly with Twila by leveraging all 4 quadrants of operant conditioning instead of confusing her by only leveraging positive reinforcement. She showed me how to use praise in situations where Twila would not take treats as well as teaching us how to help Twila build a calmer state of mind outside. Holistically, balanced training changed our relationship for the better, with the e-collar being a crucial part of this training because it allows me another avenue with which to communicate with Twila. One of Twila's favorite activities is to run along the beach at Fort Funston off-leash and having a tool like the e-collar as well as a balanced training foundation gives me peace-of-mind given her fearful nature. She is so happy running off leash and I am forever grateful for balanced training and the e-collar to have unlocked this for us.

Given my experience, as an SF resident I am opposed to the e-collar ban. The purpose of the e-collar is to allow me to clearly communicate with Twila and to give her clear direction, which is crucial for her as a fearful dog and makes her feel safe outside. I understand that the e-collar, just like any other training tool, can be misused. However, a blanket ban is not the answer because there are so many owners and dogs such as myself and Twila whose lives have been changed for the better who use this tool ethically, correctly, and only after seeking professional help. By banning this tool you are destroying my ability to provide the fulfilling life for Twila that she deserves. I love Twila so much and would never want to harm her so my decision to use an e-collar is not one I take lightly. It is not like I put an e-collar on Twila and call it a day. To help her with her confidence and our relationship, we did activities such as weekly agility classes for a year, she goes to daycare once a week, and she is showered with love from myself and my partner. I cook her a whole chicken breast every week and we use it as a high value treat to practice recall (she will now take food outside, sometimes!). My point here is that I am an owner who loves her dog and also uses the e-collar, and so the proposed legislation which states Twila can be taken away from me after the 3rd offense of being caught with the e-collar is terrifying to me.

I am definitely against utilizing such a tool to abuse a dog and all for responsible use. As such, if SF would like to take action, I would recommend instead understanding how we can provide better education and support around responsible use. I also understand and believe that for many dogs positive-reinforcement-only training is enough. I have no doubt it works for many others. But, it did not work for Twila and I. And so my stance is we should be providing SF residents with the choice to use balanced training to better their relationships with their dogs and to use tools such as the e-collar. Additionally, as an SF resident I would like for the city's time and resources to be spent on reinforcing existing legislation such as leash laws or pet littering. I see so many off-leash dogs every day in areas where they should not be as well as dog waste on the streets. In my opinion, it is really not the best use of time to be using these resources to police responsible dog owners who are using the e-collar.

Thank you for reading and please let me know if you have any questions that I can help answer.

Best,

Jessica

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