



2020-59: Miller vs Vernon Morning Star

September 16, 2020 - For immediate release

The National NewsMedia Council has reviewed a complaint and considers corrective action has been taken by the Vernon Morning Star regarding a September 3, 2020 article *Small dog attacked by pit bull at Salmon Arm beach*.

The complainant, Kourtnei Miller, objected to the repeated description of “pit bull” applied to a dog reported to have attacked and bitten another dog.

The complainant said the description was “irresponsible” and alleged that no investigation was done to verify the pit bull description. She said the reporting was “damaging” and encouraged stigma against the breed.

The news media organization stated that the pit bull description was given by the owner of the dog that was attacked. It stated that the reporter followed up by speaking with the dog control officer, who confirmed that description. It said that confirmation “formed the basis of the story’s reference to that term, which was done in good faith, based on his experience and expertise.”

Information about the sources of the description of the dog as a pit bull was omitted in the original story, but the news organization stated the article was amended to include that information about sources. A link to the amended article was provided.

The NNC is aware of public controversy over pit bulls, and around breed-specific bylaw that can result in allegations of discrimination against the breed. However, it is not the job of a reporter to settle that controversy. The NNC supports the role of journalism, which among other responsibilities has the job of reporting on newsworthy incidents in the community. The NNC upholds journalistic standards that require news reports to be accurate, and to seek out information from credible sources. It is the job of journalism to report such information in context.

In reviewing this complaint, the NNC is of the view that the lack of information in the original article regarding the source of the description of the dog was corrected in the amended article. Best practice would be to provide an editor’s note stating that the story was updated to provide the source of information about the breed of the dog in question. However, the NNC considers the matter resolved due to corrective action.