

Shanmugam weighs in on puppy's death

By AUDREY TAN

LAW Minister K. Shanmugam has weighed in on an online controversy over a seven-month-old mongrel which was put down for aggression by its adopter of four months.

In a Facebook post yesterday, he said animal welfare volunteer Ada Ong, 35, who found Tammy a home with adopter Alison McElwee, "should get a lawyer to pursue the matter".

He was responding to online criticism of Ms McElwee for putting Tammy down. A veterinarian at The Animal Clinic had agreed to do it as the dog had allegedly bitten Ms McElwee and her children and "was aggressive" during examinations.

Negative sentiment intensified after Ms Ong, an assistant project manager, cited text messages and an adoption contract signed between the two, which specified that Ms Ong had to be notified if Tammy could not be cared for.

In his post, the minister said he had asked for a copy of the adoption agreement. "Ada also showed me the SMS exchanges between the adopter and herself, which seems to bear out what Ada says," he wrote.

Based on these instances, he suggested, in a subsequent comment on the post, that Ms Ong see a lawyer to "consider her rights (in relation to) the adopter, under the contract".

He also said he had suggested one who would help pro bono.

He added that Mr Louis Ng, executive director of animal welfare group Acres, said that money for the legal action could be raised if necessary.

"I'm very grateful that the minister has stepped up to look into this matter and do something for our strays," said Ms Ong.

A call between Mr Shanmugam and Ms Ong was set up for Tuesday at his request, said Mr Ng. "Taking legal action will send out a strong message to make sure it doesn't happen again."

However, Mr Shanmugam also urged netizens to be careful "about making alle-



Seven-month-old mongrel Tammy was put down for aggression by its adopter earlier this month, sparking an online controversy and drawing the adopter and the vet criticism. PHOTO: PRISCILLA TAN

gations against the vet" without having full knowledge of the facts.

He also emphasised that "the contract is between Ada and the adopter", and that the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA), which released a media statement on euthanasia guidelines on Tuesday, was not commenting on whether Ms McElwee "was right or wrong in her actions, under the contract with Ada".

In the statement, the AVA also reiterated that the "arrangement between the rescuer and the adopter is a private matter", and parties should "settle the matter amicably".

Singapore Management University law associate professor Eugene Tan echoed the sentiment, saying the Law Minister's involvement was a "personal" one.

"This might be a way to take the case

away from the public spotlight, and try to see whether resolving it based on contractual terms can provide a way forward," he added.

Mr Shanmugam added in a press statement last night: "I had been following the news on this matter. The SMS exchanges that were reported (between Ada and the adopter) made me think that this is a matter that should be looked at carefully.

"So I asked Louis (from Acres) to contact Ada, and then spoke with her and Louis. I looked through the contract that Ada had signed with the adopter. I had some clear views on the contract and told Ada what I thought. I also asked her to get legal advice."

Ms McElwee and her lawyer declined comment.

✉ audreyt@sph.com.sg