Repealing Breed-Specific Legislation
Moving beyond breed to save dogs and strengthen communities
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In 1986, the first dog ever to be used by the Los Angeles Police Department for narcotics detection died of liver cancer at the age of 10. His name was Frog. During his eight years on the force he was credited with locating drug shipments worth more than $160 million.

I mention Frog's service because he was a pit bull—a dog that Montreal recently decided is such a threat to human safety that it doesn't belong within city limits. Under Montreal's new ban, no resident can acquire or adopt a "pit-bull-type" dog. Those who currently own pets bearing this vague label will be subject to a number of complex licensing protocols. New residents to the area risk having their companions seized and put down. Unclaimed pit bulls in the city's animal shelters will be slated for euthanasia.

The ban, in a word, is stupid: Far from protecting the public, breed-based laws actually imperil it. They divert resources from the individual animals causing real problems, focusing attention instead on dogs who look a certain way yet haven't harmed anyone. The American Veterinary Medical Assn., the National Animal Control Assn., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Bar Assn. and even the White House have denounced this approach.

Of the roughly 60 dog-bite deaths reported in Canada since 1964, "pit bulls" have been involved in only two. But Montreal is not alone in its folly. In the last three decades, several hundred U.S. cities and towns have passed breed-based laws like Montreal's. (The city of Los Angeles flirted with an anti-pit-bull ordinance in 1980, but did not enact one.)

Laws of this type can be traced back to at least the late 19th century, when fluffy white "spitz" dogs were persecuted on the mistaken belief that they were uniquely susceptible to rabies. Soon after, Massachusetts banned bloodhounds and Great Danes on account of their supposed "viciousness." And in the 1920s, a New York magistrate urged that German shepherds be regulated because they were "bred from wolves." Each of these outrages reflected the media-driven hysterias of the age. Today's breed bans are no different; only the targeted dogs have changed.

Frenzied media coverage tends to follow dog-bite fatalities—at least if a "pit bull" is to blame. (In Montreal's case, the dog that killed 55-year-old Christiane Vadnais in early June, triggering the latest panic, was registered as a boxer.) For whatever reason, incidents involving dogs from other breed groups don't inspire quite the same level of public outrage. Just a few days before Vadnais's attack, for example, a 4-year-old girl was killed by a "husky mix" in the rural Canadian territory of Nunavut. No one in Canada clamored for a ban.

In fact, of the roughly 60 dog-bite deaths reported in Canada since 1964, "pit bulls" have been involved in only two, while "sled dogs" and "huskies" have been responsible for more than 25.

The most obvious problem with breed-specific legislation is that it is in no way specific. Like "hound," the term "pit bull" denotes several breeds, not just one. Montreal's new bylaw prohibits ownership of pedigree American pit bull terriers, American Staffordshire terriers and Staffordshire bull terriers. It also bans any mixed-breed dog thought to be related to...
one of those breeds and any dog that presents a physical “characteristic” of one of those breeds. It is unclear which canine “characteristics” will be most salient (having four legs and a tail happens to be a “pit bull characteristic”) and who, if anyone, is qualified to make that call.

The second issue is that these laws are notoriously ineffective. Denver banned pit bulls in 1989, yet according to data collected by the Coalition for Living Safely With Dogs, the rate of dog-bite-injury hospitalizations in Denver is now significantly higher than that of the surrounding areas, where no bans are in place. The United Kingdom banned pit bulls in 1991, yet serious dog-bite injuries there have also risen, especially in under-resourced areas. Ontario banned pit bulls in 2005, but in Toronto, dog bites are up, not down.

Cynical politicians tend to frame the need for breed bans in zero-sum terms: Either you care about public safety, or you care about animal welfare. What gets lost in the divisive rhetoric is that there’s a superior alternative: Ordinances that hold every dog owner to the same high standards of civic responsibility serve both interests equally.

In 1991, Multnomah County, Oregon, established a community-based animal control program aimed at reducing dog bites without targeting specific breeds. By imposing strict regulations on nuisance dogs before serious injuries occurred, the county decreased recidivism by 60%. The Canadian city of Calgary has also enjoyed great success with a similar program geared toward responsible pet ownership. A 2013 survey of 36 Canadian municipalities found that increased enforcement of breed-neutral regulations (such as leash and containment laws) led to the most noticeable drop in dog-bite injuries.

In recognition of such facts, a Quebec Superior Court judge has put Montreal’s ban on hold—for now. One can only hope that science, rather than fear, will determine what happens next. The lives of domestic dogs are shaped by the choices humans make for them. It’s up to us to keep each other safe.

- Bronwen Dickey, "We're safer without pit bull bans"  
Los Angeles Times, October 2016
Pet-keeping culture in Canada has changed dramatically over the past decade. From the rise of daycare for dogs to easily available pet health insurance, Canadians are investing a tremendous amount of time, energy and love in their four-legged companions. Approximately 35% of Canadian households have a dog—that’s more than 4.5 million pet dogs (Canada’s Pet Wellness Report, 2011)! What’s more, 93% of Canadians say their dog makes their family complete (Purina® Dog Chow® Family Poll, 2013). Indicators like the number of dogs sleeping in their human’s bed—more than half (Purina® Dog Chow® Family Poll, 2013)—and the amount spent annually on pets—around $5 billion—illustrate that the majority of Canadians love and care for pets appropriately and successfully. Most companion animals in the country are safe and loved.

That said, there are still huge systematic threats causing animals to lose their homes, and many of them end up in our nation’s animal shelters every year. For dogs, perhaps one of the worst threats is breed-specific legislation, or BSL. BSL restricts dog ownership by breed, creating obstacles and hardship for many dogs and dog owners. An extensive patchwork of cities and municipalities currently have bans and restrictions in place. Sadly, Ontario has a province-wide ban on certain breeds of dogs, and at the time of writing, Quebec is considering adopting a similar ban. Despite strong evidence that the vast majority of people with dogs are managing them well, ensuring their behaviour is in line with social expectations, an unacceptable amount of legislation across the country ban, regulate or place additional restrictions on certain breeds or types of dogs.

Rather than basing public policy on the facts and pet-keeping trends, BSL is based on fear and myth. In recent years many municipalities have repealed their breed-based laws and adopted breed-neutral approaches to animal management. Humane Society International/Canada (HSI/Canada) opposes breed-based laws and policies and encourages policy makers around the country to implement smarter, better policies for safer communities.

This toolkit has been designed to empower you and other advocates to repeal harmful BSL in your community, and to transform your community into a safer place for both dogs and people. When using this toolkit, we encourage you to collaborate with local stakeholders, including HSI/Canada representatives, local shelters, rescue groups and animal advocacy groups. By forming a unified coalition, we can eliminate the destruction caused by breed-specific legislation. Although this toolkit has been designed primarily to repeal municipal by-laws, the same strategy can be adopted to amend provincial legislation.

Read on to learn the truth about BSL and to help your community become a place where dogs aren’t judged by their looks, but by their behaviour. BSL is not about one breed or type of dog; it is about all dogs and all people. It is a dying trend, and it’s time to leave this kind of bad policy where it belongs: in the past.
Putting dog bites in perspective: most dogs never bite

Despite widespread and often sensationalized media coverage of dog bites and attacks, there is no dog bite epidemic. The reality is that most dogs never bite. For example, in the United States, reported dog bites have significantly decreased across the country since the 1970s (NCRC, 2016).

In Canada, it is important to note that there is no federal, centralized reporting agency for dog bite information and most provinces do not collect dog bite information by breed. Most dog bite information is collected on a local level, by hospitals or animal service agencies, and the methods used to collect said information vary widely and involve a great deal of subjectivity. Circumstances regarding the bites and important variables other than breed are left out, while subjective breed descriptors are used to conclude that some dogs are more dangerous than others. Because a breed’s population within any given locality is unknown, incident rates by breed cannot be reliably determined, even if visual breed identification was accurate.

Proponents of BSL often refer to false statistics that are actually based on their own biased research, misleading people to believe that certain breeds or types of dogs are more likely to bite or attack. This minority group of anti-dog advocates runs a fear-mongering campaign based on misinformation. They target vulnerable communities where serious dog attacks have happened, capitalizing on people’s grief and trauma. Rather than offering sustainable and humane solutions, they offer short-sighted, inhumane and wasteful ideas which do nothing to prevent dog bites and attacks. The mere suggestion that it is possible to ban a breed of dog from a community is out of touch with reality.

In Canada, one to two human deaths a year, on average, can be attributed to dog attacks; they occur within a human population of 35 million and a canine population estimated at 4.5 million. It makes no sense to talk about dog bites and behaviour in the same context as dog bite-related fatalities, yet anti-pit bull propagandists convolute the subjects all the time. So let’s talk about those fatalities.

A comprehensive study on dog bite-related fatalities, published by The Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association in 2013, identified multiple, co-occurring factors in all cases, and breed was not one of them (Patronek, Sacks, Delise, Cleary, Marder 2013). In fact, that study says dog bite-related fatalities are multifactorial and that there is no single factor responsible for these events. In cases where the breed(s) of dog(s) could be reliably identified, more than 20 breeds and at least two mixed-breed dogs were identified.
Based on this analysis of all dog bite-related fatalities known to have occurred over a ten-year period, the researchers identified a co-occurrence of multiple, controllable factors of which breed was not included:

- No able-bodied person being present to intervene (87.1%)
- The victim having no familiar relationship with the dog(s) (85.2%)
- The dog(s)’s owner failing to neuter/spay the dog(s) (84.4%)
- A victim’s compromised ability, whether based on age or physical condition, to manage their interactions with the dog(s) (77.4%)
- The owner keeping dog(s) as resident dog(s), rather than as family pet(s) (76.2%)
- The owner’s prior mismanagement of the dog(s) (37.5%)
- The owner’s abuse or neglect of dog(s) (21.1%)

Four or more of these factors were present in 80.5% of the cases. You can read more about the study at nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com.

In addition to these findings, our colleagues at The Humane Society of the United States have observed strong patterns in dog bite-related fatalities and other serious attacks. Often, they occur in a lower-income household or an underserved community, indicating a lack of pet-related information and services, which explains why so many of the dogs are not spayed or neutered. Pets for Life (PFL), a program developed and run by The HSUS, operates in more than 30 underserved communities across the United States. It has produced a great deal of data demonstrating how access (or lack thereof) to veterinary and pet care services, information and resources plays a role in the health and wellness of a community’s pet population. For example:

- The incidence rate of unaltered pets in underserved communities is 87% overall, meaning that nearly 9 in 10 pets are unaltered at the time of the first meeting with PFL.
- A strong majority of pets in underserved communities have not seen a veterinarian before meeting the PFL outreach teams. This is due to the lack of access to affordable veterinary services, not a lack of interest or care from people.
- Two-thirds of all unaltered pets healthy enough for surgery are spayed/neutered through PFL, resulting in about seven in every 10 pets being altered if the clients are consistently engaged by the outreach teams (HSUS, 2014).

Those findings seem to be corroborated in Canada, since many dog bite-related fatalities occur in areas where there is a lack of access to pet-related services. Indeed, dog-related fatalities are disproportionately high in rural/remote areas, including on First Nation reserves, although only 22% of Canada’s population lives in rural areas and an estimated 1.3% on First Nation reserves. Approximately three out of every four reported Canadian deaths were caused by multiple dogs, whereas fewer than one-third of U.S. fatalities from 1979 through 1994 were caused by multiple dogs (Raghavan, 2008).

When examining the causes of dog bite-related fatalities, it’s important to consider how these trends in underserved communities translate to a lack of access to veterinary services, healthy socialization and understanding about dog behaviour and health. There are strong indicators in each of these cases that red flags were present and that intervention from an animal welfare or veterinary organization could have prevented these tragic incidents. In order to identify these types of situations, animal care and control organizations need to conduct more proactive, community-based outreach. In other words, when people have access to pet care services, dog-related injuries are less likely to occur.

BSL is often a knee-jerk reaction to a bite incident in a community, often fueled by fear-mongering from BSL proponents. However, we know that these types of laws ignore the true scope of the problem. The truth is that BSL has never led to any positive outcomes or dog bite reduction anywhere it has been tried. To boot, it has never reduced or eliminated a certain type or breed of dog from a community.

No one should ever be a victim of a dog attack. These tragic incidents should fuel us to steer communities in the direction of effective dog management (by providing the most accurate information) and away from harmful forms of propaganda.
Bad laws have high costs

HSI/Canada opposes breed-specific legislation because it doesn’t work. We trust pet owners and believe they can make the best decisions for their families. Breed-based restrictions do nothing to address problems but rather take beloved dogs away from families who want them. Trying to address problems in a community by targeting dogs by breed is a poor strategy, and it doesn’t improve public safety or animal welfare. In fact, no jurisdiction with BSL has ever been able to demonstrate an increase in public safety or a significant reduction in the population of banned dog breeds. Breed-based laws are costly and difficult to enforce and add to an already overburdened and under-resourced animal services system. Dogs impounded due to BSL are almost always condemned to death, even when they’ve done nothing wrong.

Managing dog behaviour and protecting public safety are serious responsibilities, and HSI/Canada wants to see safe communities abound. We sympathize with victims of dog bites and attacks and their families, and the tragedy they have endured motivates us to advocate against policies we know will not work. Not only does BSL not help to achieve those goals, it actually moves communities further away from safety because it provides a false sense of security and wastes critical resources. A number of dog bite-related fatalities have occurred in jurisdictions with BSL already on the books, proving it doesn’t increase the community’s safety and is a distraction from addressing more fundamental laws.

As the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) notes in its report on community dog-bite prevention, “singling out 1 or 2 breeds for control can result in a false sense of accomplishment. Doing so ignores the true scope of the problem and will not result in a responsible approach to protecting a community’s citizens” (2001). The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association’s (CVMA) position is very much along the same lines, as it “supports dangerous dog legislation provided that it is not discriminatory of a specific breed.”

Many of the jurisdictions with the longest standing BSL openly admit that it doesn’t work and that it actually does harm. Since Ontario introduced a provincial ban on certain breeds of dogs in 2005, the city of Ottawa uses its enforcement discretion in respect of the legislation. In a report submitted to the Community and Protective Services Committee, the management team of the Emergency and Protective Services Department states: “There are a number of issues associated with breed-specific legislation of this type, one of the most significant being breed identification, especially where mixed breeds are involved. Singling out particular breeds is both over-inclusive and under-inclusive; that is, many well-behaved dogs among the controlled breeds are included and many poorly behaved dogs from other breeds are excluded.” BSL has a backlash effect which does more to create dangerous dogs than to prevent them, because it drives owners of those dogs farther away from public places and services they need to socialize their dogs and keep them healthy (like spay/neuter and vaccinations). It keeps dogs tethered in backyards and crated in basements, out of the public eye. It creates shame and hardship for dog owners, casts stereotypes and negative perceptions and is bad for neighbourhood and community relations.
Breed bans and restrictions force dogs out of homes and into shelters, taking up kennel space and resources needed by animals who are truly homeless. Underfunded animal control agencies bear the burden of enforcing the laws, and are often called on to decide, based on looks alone, whether a dog belongs to a certain breed. Battles erupt between dog owners and local agencies—and often continue in the courts—costing the community resources that could have been spent on effective, breed-neutral dog laws and enforcement.

Animal shelters in jurisdictions with BSL remain flooded with legally unadoptable dogs, and shelters in neighbouring cities and municipalities usually end up taking in the dogs from places with bans, like a shell game. Even animal welfare programs which target by breed with the best of intentions have found it to be counter-productive.

Bill Bruce is the former director of animal services for the City of Calgary. He implemented an animal-control program for the city focused on responsible pet ownership. The Calgary model is now among the most effective in North America. He had this to say regarding breed bans in an article from July 2010:

[BSL] separates and polarizes our community. All of the responsible dog owners who happen to have one of the target breed are driven underground and even persecuted by those that are trying to justify the breed bans as the solution. The friends of those dog owners who know this breed to be a good, balanced and safe animal based on their exposure to an animal that is under the care of a responsible dog owner are also drawn into the battle as are the responsible owners who own breeds that look similar to a banned breed or fear their breed will be the next one targeted. The very people we need to support as leaders in the community, the responsible dog owners, are driven away. Millions of dollars are spent in court battles over BSL instead of being spent on solving the issue. As the lists of banned breeds grow because bites are going up not down the problem gets bigger.

... The solution is disturbingly simple – stop trying to regulate the wrong end of the leash. Stop trying to regulate the dog and start regulating the owner and mandating the change of the owner’s behaviour that will lead to a change in the dog’s behaviour.

The mixed breed dog: what it means and why it matters

Complicating the issue of breed bans and restrictions is the fact that many, if not the majority of Canadian pet dogs, are mixed breeds. Through canine genetic testing, studies have found that even people in animal-related professions can’t accurately identify the breeds in a mixed-breed dog’s genealogy through visual inspection alone. Tragically, breed-biased laws have caused the deaths of countless dogs whose only crime was to resemble a certain type of dog.

People often casually apply the term “pit bull” to three breeds and their mixes: American pit bull terrier, American Staffordshire terrier and Staffordshire bull terrier. Other dogs frequently lumped into the “pit bull” category include bulldogs, boxers, presa canaries, cane corsos, mastiffs and various mixes of all of these. Besides the fact that visual breed identification is unreliable, breed is becoming increasingly irrelevant across the country, making the idea of breed-specific policies even less appropriate.
The advent of DNA testing to identify the various breeds that make up a particular dog’s genes has helped demonstrate the difficulty of accurate visual identification. Genes are mysterious in the way they combine to create an animal’s features; sometimes a dog who appears to be a pit bull may turn out to be a Labra-poodle-terri-hound. Check out some examples of what testing has revealed about the pooches shown here—it’s proof that when it comes to “pit bulls,” you can’t believe your eyes.

Studies have also been conducted on breed identification in animal shelters. Four Florida shelters participated in a study conducted by Kimberly R. Olson, BS; Julie K. Levy, DVM, PhD, DACVIM; and Bo Norby, CMV, MPVM, PhD. Four staff members at each of the four shelters indicated what breed(s) they thought 30 dogs were, for a total of 16 observers and 120 dogs. In this study, the terms American pit bull terrier, American Staffordshire terrier, Staffordshire bull terrier and pit bull were included in the study definition of pit bull-type breeds. Of the 120 dogs, 55 were identified as “pit bulls” by shelter staff, but only 25 were identified as pit bulls by DNA analysis. The staff missed identifying 20% of the dogs who were pit bulls by DNA analysis, while only 8% of the “true” pit bulls were identified by all staff members. Dogs were coded as “pit bull” if American Staffordshire terrier or Staffordshire bull terrier were identified to comprise at least 25% of the breed signature.

It is important to know that, while these DNA tests underscore why breed-specific policy is unworkable, they are not 100% reliable. The underlying issue about BSL remains the erroneous suggestion that breed dictates behaviour, and that a particular breed or type of dog is more dangerous than any other.

"Since visual breed identification is purely a guessing game, we do not attribute breed labels to the dogs in our shelter, unless a dog arrives at our shelter with registration papers from a recognized kennel club."

– Montreal SPCA
Experts don’t support breed-based policies

Breed-based policies aren’t founded on science or credible data, but on myths and misinformation surrounding different breeds. Their impact on dogs, families and animal shelters, however, is heartbreakingly real. Below are quotes from experts who agree that BSL and similar policies that restrict dogs based on appearance do not reduce dog bites in communities or enhance public safety.

Canadian

Canada Safety Council

“An attack by a vicious dog prompts calls for a ban on that breed. Aside from the problem of objective breed identification, breed bans fail to make owners responsible for the behaviour of their dogs. Violent or irresponsible individuals who want an aggressive dog will seek out an animal not included in the ban. A preventive approach combines effective animal control measures, responsible owners, reputable breeders and public education, backed up with enforcement and based on reliable data.”

Canadian Kennel Club

“The Canadian Kennel Club does not support breed-specific legislation. The Canadian Kennel Club's opposition to breed-specific legislation is based on the fact that a dangerous temperament is a product of many factors, and not by breed alone. Thus, breed-specific legislation may include dogs which are not dangerous, while excluding those which are.”

Canadian Veterinary Medical Association

“The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) supports dangerous dog legislation provided that it is not discriminatory of a specific breed. This legislation should be directed at fostering the safety and protection of the general public from dogs classified as “dangerous” or “vicious.” The CVMA encourages and supports a community approach to dog bite prevention, including responsible breeding, training, pet selection and pet ownership as well as education on animals in the community.”

National Companion Animal Coalition

“The National Companion Animal Coalition does not support breed-specific bans as an effective tool to protect the public from vicious or dangerous dogs.”

American

American Bar Association

“…the American Bar Association urges all state, territorial and local legislative bodies and governmental agencies to adopt comprehensive breed-neutral dangerous dog/reckless owner laws that ensure due process protections for owners, encourage responsible pet ownership and focus on the behaviour of both dog owners and dogs, and to repeal any breed discriminatory or breed specific provisions.”

American Veterinary Medical Association

“Dog bite statistics are not really statistics, and they do not give an accurate picture of dogs that bite. Invariably the numbers will show that dogs from popular large breeds are a problem. This should be expected, because big dogs can physically do more damage if they do bite, and any popular breed has more individuals that could bite. Dogs from small breeds also bite and are capable of causing severe injury. There are several reasons why it is not possible to calculate a bite rate for a breed or to compare rates between breeds.”

“Statistics on fatalities and injuries caused by dogs cannot be responsibly used to document the ‘dangerousness’ of a particular breed, relative to other breeds, for several reasons.”
American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior

“Any dog may bite, regardless of the dog’s size or sex, or reported breed or mix of breeds. The AVSAB’s position is that such legislation—often called breed-specific legislation (BSL)—is ineffective, and can lead to a false sense of community safety as well as welfare concerns for dogs identified (often incorrectly) as belonging to specific breeds.”

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The CDC recommends against using breed as a factor in dog-bite prevention policy and states: “Any dog of any breed has the potential to bite.”

National Canine Research Council

“The trend in prevention of dog bites continues to shift in favor of multifactorial approaches focusing on improved ownership and husbandry practices, better understanding of dog behaviour, education of parents and children regarding safety around dogs, and consistent enforcement of dangerous dog/reckless owner ordinances in communities. Effective laws hold all dog owners responsible for the humane care, custody, and control of all dogs regardless of breed or type.”

Former President Obama’s Administration

“We don’t support breed-specific legislation—research shows that bans on certain types of dogs are largely ineffective and often a waste of public resources.”

BSL on the decline—where is BSL?

Fortunately, more people and their elected officials are learning why breed bans and restrictions don’t make sense, and as a result, BSL is on the decline. Moreover, in recent years in the U.S., multiple states have passed laws prohibiting BSL on the local level, known as preemptions, and many municipalities have replaced BSL with breed-neutral policies. Repealing BSL has not resulted in more dog bites in these communities.

In other words, there is no state-level BSL in the United States, and all remaining BSL exists in local ordinances of cities, counties, townships, etc. Unfortunately, in Canada, Ontario adopted a province-wide ban, and at the time of writing, Quebec is considering adopting a similar ban. We have created several maps that illustrate the current landscape of BSL in Canada and in the U.S., the first of which displays the number of municipalities in each Canadian province and territories that contain breed-specific provisions in their by-laws. The second map illustrates preemption laws in the U.S.

Did you know?

Service and assistance animals as defined by federal law are exempt from breed bans and restrictions, and dogs of all breeds are eligible to serve as service or assistance animals.
Degrees of BSL

In the map below, you will find provinces separated into categories based on the amount of BSL that exists within the province. As you can see, many provinces have a significant number of municipalities that ban or restrict dogs by breed.

The provinces with a high prevalence of BSL create a patchwork of dog laws, making it extremely difficult for residents to navigate which communities allow their dogs and which do not. This creates negative consequences for residents because they limit relocation options for personal or professional reasons within the province or the country, hinder lifesaving abilities for animal adoption organizations and undoubtedly result in dogs who have not exhibited any problem behaviour losing their homes and often their lives because owners unknowingly or without choice moved into a jurisdiction with BSL.

*At the time of compiling these statistics, the Government of Quebec is hoping to adopt a bill that could eventually result in the prohibition of certain breeds of dogs throughout the province.
**Situation in the United States**

BSL has had a long history in the U.S. and has been on the decline in recent years.

In the following map, the green states rank the highest because they have no BSL and also have a preemption law on the books prohibiting BSL from being enacted at the state or local level. All dogs are welcome in this state, and these states do not tell their residents what kind of dog they can or cannot have.

In yellow states, there is no state-level preemption law, but there is also no BSL being enforced to the best of our knowledge. Orange states have a state-level preemption law, but there are cases that are being allowed due to either being grandfathered in, being part of a home-rule exemption or due to the language of the legislation. Red states rank the lowest because they have existing BSL and no state law to prevent new bans from being enacted.
Is BSL about dogs, or is it really about people?

Even though it is important to know the facts about dogs and dog bites when working against BSL, an interesting conversation has recently emerged suggesting that BSL has more to do with complicated human dynamics than with dogs. We strongly encourage all stakeholders to spend some time reflecting on how BSL may be used as a scapegoating mechanism in policymaking. Just as people deserve to be treated as individuals, dogs should not be subject to harmful stereotypes and myths about who owns them. Here are some excerpts from that discourse:

Journalist Joseph Facal wrote an article in the *Journal de Montréal* in May 2016 where he expressed his limited and denigrating views on pit bull owners [translated from French]:

“There are morons everywhere, but columnist Yves Boisvert suggested that they are probably overrepresented among pit bull owners. Let us take a moment to look at this foolish and marginal group, probably mostly composed of young people with raging testosterone. Could it be that they experience a kind of macho pleasure in walking with a dog that provokes fear in the eyes of those who see it? Could it be more or less like strutting around with a nickel-plated Colt 45 tucked in your belt? Could it be that they are young people whose studies or careers fail to boost their self-esteem? I’m just asking…”

Bronwen Dickey, author of *Pit Bull: Battle Over an American Icon*, does not shy away from the idea that discrimination against people plays a large role in the perpetuation of breed-specific legislation.

“Many people who believe that pit bulls are uniquely dangerous to humans maintain that their feelings are based solely on the actions of the dogs and not racial or cultural animus toward their owners, and for a number of them that is undoubtedly true. But the loud reverberation of racialized language, especially the word “thug,” in their criticisms is deafening. In much the same way that pit bulls have been systematically “de-caninized,” their owners have been dehumanized.”

An October 2016 *Washington Post* opinion piece, “The Dirty Secret Behind Banning Certain Dog Breeds,” suggests “that the motivation behind movements to ban specific types of dog aren’t really about the dogs at all. They may instead be proxies by which uneasy majorities can register their suspicions about the race, class and ethnicity of the people who own those dogs.”

It was clear during the 2014 ballot measure to repeal BSL in Aurora, Colorado, that the issue went beyond dog breeds. A city councilwoman was quoted as saying, “Oh, you bet if I could, I would ban the owners, too … by banning the dogs, we lose the violent behaviour that comes with the owners.” In what seems to plainly acknowledge that breed bans are substantiated by myths, she also stated that “it’s not about a fact, it’s about a feeling.”
Assess the by-law’s history and research the issue

Take the time to look into the history of your piece of legislation; it will pay off later when you are talking to officials about your proposed repeal. It will be helpful to collect stories from residents about how BSL hurts families and other animals by taking up resources in the community. Be sure to know as many of the following points of information as possible:

- When was it passed?
- Was it motivated by an incident?
- When it was passed, what else was going on in the community?
- What is the community like? Is it progressive or conservative? Research community demographics.
- Who were proponents and who opposed? Do they still? Often the animal control agency will have changed its mind on these measures after having to enforce them.
- Is it working for the intended purpose? How is that being measured?
- Do banned dogs still live in the community?
- Have dog bites or incidents been reduced?
- Has it accomplished anything positive?
- Who does the legislation affect?

It is important that you be able to speak with authority about this issue and how it affects all members of the community. If a neighbouring community has recently repealed their BSL, you may want to begin by researching their repeal effort. Information about why the town made the change can often influence your public officials. Having testimonials from those officials is even more powerful.

Draft talking points to keep handy as you promote the idea of a repeal effort with your local city council and the public at large. You can include quotes from experts, arguments for public safety and effects on the sheltering community, as found in the previous section of this toolkit. For sample talking points, see page 23. It is important to remember that BSL is not about one type of dog, but instead affects all dogs and people in the community. Your repeal effort should reflect this principle. BSL
by-laws are often centered around cities where human density is highest. A substantial number of by-laws are located in less densely populated areas as well. This can help draw perspective on BSL and raise pertinent questions. For example:

- Do these by-laws limit people’s access to animal wellness and veterinary services?
- If banned dogs are brought to those service providers for care, what happens?
- Does this place more dogs and people in jeopardy and decrease access to care?
- How do these by-laws compare with shelter intake and euthanasia in your province?
- Do these by-laws prevent families from relocating within the province?
- Do these by-laws limit economic or employment opportunities for residents?
- How do these by-laws compare with human demographics in the province?

Mobilize within your community

Getting a local by-law repealed or replaced takes significant effort and strategy, so be prepared for the long haul! Getting active community support can make or break the legislation you are trying to pass. A diverse coalition of advocates will show your elected officials that a significant portion of the community supports your efforts. We strongly recommend a group approach to ensure that the viewpoints of all stakeholders are heard. Don’t be surprised if fellow citizens have questions and need information; the powerful hype around pit bull dogs has influenced many people. But remember that people are mostly kind, smart and have common sense. Center your messages on those commonalities like wanting to live in a community where members are trusted to care for their dogs safely, and employing non-discriminatory approaches to addressing problems. Be positive and consistent, focusing on the bright spots. Make sure you reach new audiences and avoid “preaching to the choir.” If there have been dog-related incidents in one neighbourhood, engage residents who live there, and include them in your campaign.

It is extremely important for you to connect with animal care and control agencies and private shelters and rescues in your community. These organizations feel the impacts of BSL because BSL increases intake and limits adoption options, decreasing their ability to save lives. Find out what their positions are—they may have questions and concerns for you, and it is important for you to listen and seek common ground whenever possible. They may be able to share statistical information regarding intake, adoptions, transfers, relinquishments, animals seized by animal control, etc. that you will be able to use in support of your proposal. Many animal enforcement agencies in areas with BSL are tired of taking people's dogs away and euthanizing dogs for no reason. BSL is costly, difficult to enforce and takes limited resources away from more effective animal management strategies. However, sometimes these agencies are unable to take a political position, so be sensitive to this and seek solutions which work for those interests.

In addition, here are some of the other stakeholders we encourage you to reach out to and involve in your effort. We’ve included some primary talking points that could help you approach them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Families and individuals with dogs who are affected by the by-laws</th>
<th>Their testimony on how this has affected their family will be critical. Guarantee their anonymity when necessary.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citizens who own dogs of all breeds and types</td>
<td>No one wants to be told what kind of dog they can or cannot have—BSL is a slippery slope of encroachment into privacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal advocates, aside from those mentioned above</td>
<td>Most animal advocates operate under the premise that “no one is free when others are oppressed” and will want to support your effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinary professionals</td>
<td>They are often called upon to provide breed identification in BSL enforcement. Most veterinarians support animal welfare measures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community safety interest groups and advocates outside of the animal welfare field

| Breed-specific legislation toolkit | Anyone with concerns for public health and safety, as well as protecting civil rights for members of the community, should be approached. BSL wastes taxpayer dollars and creates an illusion of safety, not to mention that it disproportionately affects people of lower incomes and resources. |
| Community safety interest groups and advocates outside of the animal welfare field | Dog breed and responsible dog ownership groups, such as the CKC | These groups tend to disagree with BSL. |

Just as it is important to connect with your allies, it can be helpful to meet with members of the opposition to see what their concerns are and whether or not any of them can be mitigated. Sometimes even a letter to the leadership of a local opposition group soon after the issue is introduced can go a long way. Unwavering proponents of BSL represent a small but vocal minority of advocates and chances are none of them live in or near the community at hand.

Below are some of the common arguments against repealing BSL and suggested responses.

**“The ban/restriction is not being enforced.”**

When Montreal proposed BSL, the Montreal SPCA took a stand and refused to enforce it as part of their service contract with local municipalities. “Like any organization, we need to act in a way that respects our fundamental values. Contributing to a system that would ultimately result in the euthanasia of healthy animals that do not pose any danger is a step that the Montreal SPCA cannot take,” said Benoit Tremblay, executive director at that time.

Some localities may have breed-based bans or restrictions in their regulations, but do not enforce them. We still want to repeal those by-laws! As long as restrictions remain on the books, they can be selectively and loosely enforced. If a by-law is not being enforced, that is all the more reason to update the regulations to reflect more effective animal management strategies.

**“Certain breeds of dogs are inherently dangerous.”**

Experts have found that no breed is more likely to bite than another. On the contrary, data suggests that the small percentage of dogs who do bite and attack include a range of breeds and mixes, and that areas where BSL has been repealed have experienced fewer or the same number of dog bite incidents. The CVMA and the NCAC both oppose BSL, along with leading animal welfare organizations.

**“BSL helps to curb the over-breeding of certain types of dogs.”**

Breeds don’t magically disappear. Animal shelters in jurisdictions with BSL remain flooded with legally unadoptable dogs, and shelters in neighbouring cities and municipalities usually end up taking in the dogs from places with bans, like a shell game. Even animal welfare programs that target by breed with the best of intentions have found it to be counter-productive.

**Get to know your elected officials**

The local legislative process varies across the country, so take the time to get familiar with how things work in your community. An official or employee in your local government may be able to help you.

Elected officials tend to take constituents’ interests seriously, so try talking to your own council member first. As much as we’d like the people we vote for to agree with us, this may not always work. If your own council member isn’t interested, don’t despair. Try to find another official with an interest in animal issues and pitch your idea to them. Often, your local animal control bureau or non-profit humane society or SPCA can point you towards a sympathetic decision-maker.
Once you’ve identified an elected official, request a meeting with this person to discuss the potential repeal effort.

- **Prepare for the meeting**
  - Gather a small group of your allies to accompany you. Having the animal control officer or a shelter contact present at the meeting can often be very beneficial. Determine the message you wish to convey before meeting. If in a group, divide up the tasks of who is the main spokesperson and who will answer questions on specific topics. Also, assign someone to take notes and to write the follow-up letter. Include brief personal stories or experiences which demonstrate why this issue is important to you or the group. Finally, keep your message brief and clear.
  - List all arguments for and against BSL and develop responses. This will help you to avoid being put on the spot. It will help to prepare your message in a letter or fact sheet to leave with the elected official.
  - Public officials will want to know the answers to the following questions:
    - Why is this issue important?
    - How does this impact his/her district?
    - How will the proposed language solve the issue?
    - Who supports the proposal?
    - Who opposes the proposal? Do they have political clout?
    - Will the proposal have a significant fiscal impact?
    - How have other provinces and cities dealt with the issue?
    - Is there opportunity for positive media (or negative)?
    - How does his/her community feel about the issue?

- **During the meeting**
  - Be on time and dress professionally. Initial impressions are important in this setting and a good one can only help your message.
  - Make sure your opening remarks are brief and contain a clear description of the issue. State your position on it and what you want the elected official to do.
  - If you lose your train of thought or get flustered, pull out your fact sheet to refresh your mind or let another member of the group pick up the discussion.
  - After presenting your message, let the official respond. Listen carefully. Have another member of your group take notes so you can focus on what the official is saying.
  - Answer questions as best you can. Do not make up answers. Acknowledge what you do not know. Make a note of the questions you could not answer and tell the legislator you will follow up with answers.
  - Keep the discussion focused on BSL. If the discussion gets off course, steer it back.

- **After the meeting**
  - Immediately take notes regarding the main points of discussion, the official’s remarks and any unanswered questions.
  - Complete your research to find information for unanswered questions.
  - Promptly follow up with a thank-you letter that restates your key points, responds to outstanding questions and reiterates any commitments made.
Identify by-law changes

It is important for you to be familiar with the by-law language you want changed. Some BSL is written into law as a stand-alone section of the by-law and other times it is woven into one or more sections. BSL can include an outright ban on ownership or additional restrictions placed on certain breeds of dogs.

In this section of the toolkit, we will outline our recommendations for breed-neutral dog management by-laws, but keep your eye on the prize and don’t let perfection be the enemy of good. Your goal is to eliminate BSL, and sometimes change comes incrementally.

Your proposal may be restricted to a nullification of breed-specific language in your city regulations by striking a standalone section, or it might include a more detailed set of changes to breed-neutralize the legislation. Depending on the current by-law, you may want to include recommendations for effective dog management as well. If the by-law already has dog management regulations that are suitable with the removal of the breed-specific language, you might not need to alter the by-law after repealing the BSL. However, if the by-law is completely lacking in dog regulations aside from the breed restrictions, we recommend replacing the BSL with breed-neutral dog management provisions. Every community needs a set of fundamental rules to maintain public health and safety as well as animal welfare standards. But remember to take it one step at a time.

The best approach to effective animal management is a balance of proactive services applied evenly across the community and reactive response to problems, complaints and incidents involving animals. Municipalities should focus resources on establishing standards for humane, safe communities through the use of basic regulations such as leash and safe confinement laws for dogs. These are both areas where law enforcement can work to establish “social norm” behaviours in a community and prevent problems before they occur. When owners are allowed to let dogs routinely roam or keep dogs on chains, there are bound to be problems, and often those problems are allowed to persist from a lack of resources and attention when enforcement agencies are spread thin. We strongly encourage communities to build a solid foundation of outreach and compliance in these areas to achieve minimum animal welfare and public safety standards and identify red flag situations.

No law can prevent dog bites, especially if no one knows what the law says. Think about how much marketing and public outreach is done around driver safety: speed limits, seat belts and distracted driving laws are all good examples to be mindful of when considering the purpose of a law and how it gets implemented. Animal management laws are most effective when they are used to create expectations in a positive way, rather than used only reactively and punitively.

Dogs at large

Most suburban and urban communities prohibit free-roaming dogs, but at-large laws are uncommon in more rural areas. Aside from laws, it is common to find free-roaming dogs in underserved or remote communities, some owned and some quasi-owned community dogs. Preventing owned dogs from roaming freely is important because loose dogs pose a risk to public safety (dog bites, auto accidents, etc.), other animals and themselves. To minimize these risks, your by-law should prevent dogs from running at large, and should include incremental intervention strategies for repeat offenders with the big-picture goal being keeping those dogs securely in their homes. Many communities establishing new at-large laws have transitioned residents to this new rule by implementing a grace period or a one-time pass to residents.

Restraint laws should generally require owners to safely and humanely confine pets on their property, balancing animal welfare with public safety. A good restraint law also regulates how animals should be handled when off their property, e.g., leashed on walks, transported inside vehicles or under control of a physically capable adult.

Tethering

Constant tethering is bad for both dogs and people. Dogs are naturally social creatures who need interaction with people and/or other animals, and long-term restraint often severely damages their physical and psychological well-being. Importantly, tethering is a major risk factor for serious dog bites and attacks. Dogs feel naturally protective of their territory; when confronted with a perceived threat, they respond according to their fight-or-flight instinct. A tied dog, unable to take flight, resorts to fight, attacking any unfamiliar animal or person who unwittingly wanders into his territory. Communities need to take a hard look at tethering and confinement and recognize that when dogs are denied the ability to exercise their natural behaviours, it has negative behavioural consequences, which can cause dogs to bite and attack.
Mary Jones is terrified of her next-door neighbour’s two large dogs who live 24/7 on chains in an unfenced yard. When she is in her yard they bark and lunge at her and she is fearful for her safety should they get loose, so she contacts her local animal services agency. Chaining may or may not be a restricted activity in this town, but either way the animal services agency mediates constructive dialogue between the neighbours and works with the owner of the dogs to mitigate possible risks. The dogs are sterilized through reduced-cost or free programs, a secure enclosure or fence is constructed for the dogs (including proper outdoor shelter) and some basic training for the dogs makes them easier to handle so the owner can socialize them more and bring them indoors at least some of the time. Animal services achieve all of this by proactively and positively engaging these two neighbours and acting as a conduit between them and community resources and programs.

Bob Smith calls 911 to report that his neighbour’s dog attacked his dog, who is at the vet and is expected to survive. When animal services talks with the neighbour, they discover the dog is not currently on vaccines, is not sterilized, is under-socialized, lives mostly outdoors with an unsecured fence and has attacked animals and bitten people previously without being reported. The dangerous dog law only applies if the attacked dog dies, but the officer knows intervention makes sense in this case. The neighbour is resistant to securing his fence and having his dog neutered but because the officer is serious and clear about the importance of it and the consequences in case of future bites and attacks, the owner responds favorably and works with the officer.

Both of the above scenarios are based on real-life incidents where instead of intervention, nothing was done to address the concerns of the citizens or prevent the problem from escalating. The real-life versions of these stories resulted in tragedy for the people, the dogs and the communities. These examples are given as a reminder of why communities don’t need huge budgets or fancy laws to address public health and safety, and why they certainly don’t need BSL.

While HSI/Canada supports efforts to ensure dogs are not continuously tethered, we recognize that people tether their dogs for a variety of reasons, including well-intentioned efforts to comply with leash laws and keep their dogs from running off, and many people are unaware of the harm it can cause. As such, efforts to inform pet owners about the dangers of tethering and assist them with solving the underlying problem that led to the tethering in the first place can be very effective in eliminating the problem. For example, is the dog an escape artist? Perhaps helping the owner build a fence will eliminate the tether permanently.

As advocates, it is important for us to find positive, constructive ways to enable owners to unchain their dogs themselves. They will be more likely to keep their dogs untethered, keep future dogs untethered and spread the word to others they know who may tether their dogs, reserving the scarce resources of animal welfare organizations for the serious cases of cruelty and neglect.

If a legislative solution, such as a tethering restriction, is being considered, it is important to know that there is no one-size-fits-all tethering by-law. The proposed legislation must be a good fit for the community given available resources and realistic prospects for enforcement. For more information on tethering laws, as well as model by-law language, please visit humanesociety.org/tethering and cutthechain.ca.

**Dangerous dogs**

The term “dangerous dog” is generally applied to dogs who have been deemed “dangerous” by a judge following one or more bites or attacks. Some provinces have dangerous dog laws and some are sufficient for localities, but in some cases localities have enacted more detailed laws. If your provincial law is sufficient, it is not necessary to change your local by-law, but we often find local officials are unaware of what their provincial law is.

Dangerous dog laws allow for law enforcement to intervene after a bite or attack has occurred. Some communities include bites or attacks on domestic and wild animals in their dangerous dog laws as well. Just as in the criminal system, every individual is innocent until proven guilty; with the stakes so high, it is important to create a breed-neutral process that allows a court of law to determine whether a dog should be declared dangerous or potentially dangerous without unnecessarily removing dogs from their homes. Requirements for dogs declared dangerous should not be overly harsh and should still allow dogs to be dogs (e.g., no over-muzzling or using harmful restraint). We recommend that dogs who have bitten are required to be altered, receive appropriate training and are always supervised and safely confined. Dogs who have bitten should not be kept on chains for long periods of time.

**Spaying and neutering**

Spaying/neutering a dog effectively manages their hormones in a way which reduces problem behaviour and makes the dogs safer. Knowing this makes it tempting to think that a law requiring people to spay or neuter their dogs would solve all the problems. However, it doesn’t work that way in reality and we caution against that approach. Mandatory spay/neuter does not create long-term social change, and often results in a backlash effect of owners who want to keep their dogs having to
relinquish or rehome them—and this is not what we want.

Make it easier for people to spay/neuter their dogs by using more effective outreach strategies as part of animal management and advocacy. Programs like Pets for Life provide a great model for increasing spay/neuter rates in a community. Because cost is the primary barrier to spay/neuter services, it’s important to create funding streams to subsidize the cost for people who cannot afford it. HSI/Canada supports efforts to create funding streams for spaying/neutering programs, especially those providing subsidies to underserved populations of pet owners. These can be provincial or local, private or government funds.

HSI/Canada has found that when spay/neuter services are made accessible and costs are subsidized, sterilization rates increase. When the opposite occurs, animal care resource deserts emerge, and this lack of access has a profound impact on the well-being of a community.

*Please see our list of resources at the end of this toolkit for more information on public policy for animals.

Advocate for your proposal

A key to your success will be strategically lobbying and testifying in support of your resolution. While you have hopefully already met with your official, you will need advocates to lobby other members of the council to gain their support. Be sure to use media in order to gain more exposure for your proposal.

Don’t forget that local officials read local papers! Schedule a meeting with the editor or editorial board of your local paper to ask them to support your proposal. Contact other media outlets, including television and radio, to let them know about your efforts. Send letters to the editor (LTE) to your local paper, remembering to state your case concisely. For sample LTEs, see page 26.
You should also use social media and encourage your coalition to do the same. As a citizen, you have the right to express your opinion to your elected official, and social media has become a great way for your voice to be heard. Twitter and Facebook have created an avenue for concerned citizens to reach their legislators directly and create meaningful discussion. When many social posts come in regarding a specific issue, the elected official is compelled to notice and hopefully take action.

If your council calls a public meeting to discuss your proposal, you should attend and testify in support of your resolution. A large and well-informed turnout at a town hall meeting or a community forum is an extremely effective way to send a strong message to your local officials, journalists and the general public (via the media).

Try to recruit others to attend the meeting with you. Inform them of the date, time, address and nature of the meeting. Plan ahead to make sure that everyone doesn’t speak on the exact same points (a common problem at public hearings). It’s especially important to have an individual who enforces the current by-law testify at the meeting.

As much as breed discrimination is a bad thing for dogs, you need to be sure to spend equal time focusing on the reasons that it is bad for families and communities.

After the vote

You may not win the first time around, but don’t give up. Talk to the individuals who voted against the repeal effort and find out why. You can learn from this experience and try to pass a better bill in the future.

If your by-law passes, congratulations! You have completed a great accomplishment, so be proud of all of your hard work. Your community will be safer for dogs and residents because of your efforts.
No law can prevent dog bites. No law has ever prevented dog bites. Laws enable law enforcement to take steps after an incident has occurred, which is important. But preventing dog bites is an effort that needs to take place on a grassroots community level. Preventing dog bites happens only when all community members with dogs have access to animal care services, information and resources. When segments of the community are cut off from important resources, problem dog behaviour is likely to occur due to a lack of awareness. True prevention is about building strong community infrastructure.

Often in the wake of dog bite tragedies, pain and ideology divide people and turn neighbours against each other. We understand why the immediate reaction to these incidents is often anger and that in our anger we look for someone to blame. We blame the dogs, the owners or whoever else we can.

The reality is these attacks are a collective fault—from those directly involved to the systems that govern our communities. But we have an incredible opportunity to evaluate this collective wound and to take action to fix it and prevent it from happening again.

Fortunately, breed-based laws are on the decline and soon to be a thing of the past. The vast majority of people practicing animal management at the local level agree that breed has nothing to do with the job. HSI/Canada works hard to fight breed-based laws and policies and guide officials and lawmakers to ones that we know will serve the community better.

But it is not enough to say no to BSL and ignore the problem at hand. We have to stare this problem in the face and solve it head-on. We need to accept the fact that sharing our society with dogs involves a minimal degree of calculated risk, and establish rules and expectations around it. This is a fundamental reality based on multiple species sharing space. To that end, we support reasonable, breed-neutral regulation of dogs; it is the bedrock of this human-animal relationship that enriches our lives and our culture.

Community-based animal management is an entirely underrated and severely under-resourced function. As a result, animal control is forced to choose reactive efforts over proactive strategies because they cannot afford to do both, and there are constant fires to put out. We have evidence from within our field and from other, more practiced and data-driven fields informing us that proactive strategies that create long-term social change often prevent fires in the first place.
Talking points

- BSL is on the decline. Many lawmakers now know it is the wrong path, leading nowhere.
  - Many municipalities in Canada have repelled BSL in recent years, such as Edmonton in Alberta.
  - In the U.S., there are no more states with BSL—all have repealed their laws, and there have been no increases in dog bites or attacks.
  - 20 states and counting prohibit BSL on a local level.
- BSL does not help, it hurts. There is no evidence of BSL having worked in any sense, anywhere, on any level of government.
- BSL does nothing to prevent dog bites or improve public safety. Proactive animal management and enforcement with a balance of community support is the best way to reduce animal bites and create a safer, more humane community.
- BSL takes dogs with no problem behaviour away from their loving families and homes. Shelters are tired of taking in animals who already have homes when they are struggling to find homes for animals who do not. BSL floods already overburdened animal shelters with large volumes of dogs, using space that should be reserved for animals who are truly homeless.
- BSL is incredibly difficult to enforce and drains resources for no good reason.
- BSL is unrealistic—it has not ever and will not ever eliminate a specific breed from a community. People love their dogs and will risk non-compliance before giving up their pets. This makes the problem worse because people and dogs become more difficult to reach for providers of animal care and wellness services. BSL creates more unvaccinated, unsterilized and unsocialized dogs.
- Canadians do not want to be told what kind of dog they can or cannot have, nor should they be. Most pet owners love and care for their companions.
- Breed does not indicate a dog’s propensity to bite—all experts agree on this (CVMA, AVMA, CDC, etc.). There is no credible evidence that supports breed as an indicator of whether a dog is safe.
- BSL is bad for all dogs, not just the ones currently being regulated. BSL is a slippery slope.
- “Pit bull” is not a breed but an arbitrary term used to describe a diverse group of dogs. Efforts to define what a “pit bull” is vary widely, underscoring the lack of science behind BSL. Research shows that visual identification is unreliable even by experts and vets.
- “Pit bull” dogs are just dogs like any other and should be treated as individuals.
Factsheet

Support By-law XXX

Breed-based policies aren’t founded on science or credible data, but on myths and misinformation surrounding different breeds. Their impact on dogs, families and animal shelters, however, is heartbreakingly real.

Experts have found that no breed is more likely to bite than another. On the contrary, data suggests that the small percentage of dogs who do bite and attack include a range of breeds and mixes, and data shows that areas where BSL has been repealed have experienced fewer or the same number of dog bite incidents. The CVMA, American expert associations such as the NACA and the U.S. CDCP all oppose BSL, along with leading animal welfare organizations.

- BSL is bad for dogs
  - Dogs with no problem behaviour are removed from families who love them.
  - Some owners—fearful of their dog being removed—take their dogs underground, making it harder to reach them with services that would benefit them and improve community safety, such as sterilization, veterinary care and training.
  - Animal shelters in jurisdictions with BSL remain flooded with legally unadoptable dogs, most of whom end up destroyed even when they’ve shown themselves to be nothing but sweet pets.

- BSL is bad for the community
  - Targeting dogs by breed is not an effective solution to any public policy matter, including public safety issues or dog bite prevention.
  - BSL actually moves communities further away from safety because it provides a false sense of security and wastes critical resources.
  - The CVMA “supports dangerous dog legislation provided that it is not discriminatory of a specific breed.”

- BSL is bad for law enforcement and animal control
  - Breed bans and restrictions force dogs out of homes and into shelters, taking up kennel space and resources that could be used for animals who are truly homeless.
  - Underfunded animal control agencies bear the burden of enforcing the laws and are often called on to decide, based on looks alone, whether a dog belongs to a certain breed, tearing wonderful pets away from families who love them.
  - Shelters in neighbouring cities and counties usually end up taking in the dogs from places with bans, like a shell game. Even animal welfare programs which target by breed with the best of intentions have found it to be counter-productive.
  - BSL is incredibly difficult to enforce and is ineffective, as it’s legally impossible to eliminate a breed from the community.
Testimony

Hello, my name is [name]. I appreciate the opportunity to speak this morning and share this information with you. As a citizen of [town], I wholeheartedly support regulations for dogs and their owners, including provisions for regulating dogs who have shown themselves to be dangerous. However, restricting and regulating dog ownership by breed does not accomplish that; it actually puts [town] farther away from the desired objective.

Effective dog management has nothing to do with breed. The most effective animal management strategies in the country center around basic laws applied consistently to all dog owners. These laws, such as proper restraint (i.e., leash laws) and confinement laws (e.g., restrictions on chaining), create standardized rules, norms and expectations in the community and create a safer environment.

When basic laws are enforced consistently, animal enforcement agencies are able to positively engage the community through intervention, providing support and information to the vast majority of pet owners who love their pets and take good care of them. When basic laws are enforced consistently, animal enforcement agencies are also able to identify and address problem situations before they result in tragedies.

Effective animal enforcement agencies respond to dog bites and attacks equally, no matter the type of dog involved. These agencies know that most dogs never bite, risk factors are not breed-specific, and most bites come from dogs belonging to family or friends in a home environment.

Breed specific policies have no basis in science. Experts like the Canadian and American Veterinary Medical Associations, the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Canadian Kennel Club agree that no breed of dog is inherently dangerous and reject breed-specific policies in lieu of effective policies.

Breed-based regulation has never been successful anywhere it has been tried, including here in [town], and is on a steep decline in public policy. In the U.S., 20 states and counting have rejected breed-based laws to the degree they prohibit cities and counties from enacting dog law based on breed.

Singling out certain residents by the breed of dog they own is a flawed strategy that hurts the law-abiding, dog-loving citizens of [town] the most and wastes precious shelter space and resources on dogs who already have loving homes and have done nothing wrong.

Actual breed-neutral factors are often ignored when a community is misdirecting their efforts on breed. Factors that actually matter include whether a dog is well socialized, altered, receiving veterinary care and more. These issues are significantly more predictive of the likelihood that a dog may be dangerous. Focusing on providing access to pet services and resources to all parts of the community, particularly those living in underserved neighbourhoods, is significantly more likely to create safer communities. Laws should be designed to lift up and strengthen a community, not regulate it to its knees.

Animal control directors from cities and municipalities with long-standing breed specific laws have been vocal about how wasteful and difficult to enforce these laws are, how tragic and heartbreaking it is to remove beloved dogs who have not violated any laws, and how much they regret having these by-laws in place. If breed remains the focus in [town], real, effective strategies for preventing dog bites will continue to be ignored.

Managing dog behaviour and protecting public safety are serious responsibilities for our community officials. I propose that the [governing body] repeal the breed-specific language in our legislation, which will move our town toward a safer future for our residents and companion animals.
Letters to the editor

Breed-specific legislation (BSL) is ineffective, costly, impossible to enforce, and harms families, dogs and communities (cite article name, date of story). BSL is based on the factually wrong assumption that breed is predictive of whether a dog may be dangerous. Moreover, BSL relies on the unreliable standard of using physical features to identify a dog's breed, which is problematic because many dogs with divergent backgrounds look similar and even animal experts, including shelter workers and even veterinarians, cannot identify a dog's breed based on physical characteristics. This leads to chaos and expensive lawsuits between people who disagree about whether a dog fits an arbitrary description that has nothing to do with community safety.

Everyone wants to live in a safe community, and we should do everything possible to prevent harmful dog related incidents from occurring, but BSL is not an effective dog management tool. I urge the governing body to repeal the BSL in our city legislation.

Breed specific legislation (BSL) is often a reactionary measure to a bite incident, and it ignores the true scope of the problem (cite article name, date of story). There is no data that supports BSL, and no jurisdiction (provincial or local) with BSL has ever been able to demonstrate an increase in public safety or a significant reduction in population of the banned dog breeds. In fact, it is not possible to completely legislate away a breed (or type) of dog legally, and experts in policy-making recommend against using breed or any single-factor approach towards dog management. If the governing body wants to increase the safety of our town for residents, they should vote to repeal the BSL.

The truth is, no law will prevent dog bites (cite article name, date of story). That is why it is important to proactively work to prevent dog bites from occurring within our community. The best approach to this is ensuring that all pet owners in the community have access to services and resources that are crucial to achieving humane pet-keeping, such as veterinary care, spay/neuter services, vaccinations, socialization opportunities, training and other resources.

Focusing on providing access to pet services and resources to all parts of the community, particularly those living in underserved neighbourhoods, is significantly more likely to create safer communities. Our laws should be designed to lift up and strengthen a community, not regulate it to its knees.

Community management of dogs has nothing to do with breed. And having animal services focused on breed restrictions rather than engaging residents in a positive, proactive way is a waste of precious resources. I encourage the governing body to continue the journey toward breed-neutral dog policy, moving our city toward a safer future.
6 Additional resources

Links found throughout the document

**Statements against BSL**

**American Bar Association**
americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/mental_physical_disability/Resolution_100.authcheckdam.pdf

**American Kennel Club**
cdn.akc.org/Government_Relations/Updated_April_2016_GDLGB2.pdf?_ga=1.11712116.1391756025.1467142082

**American Veterinary Medical Association**
avma.org/KB/Resources/Reports/Pages/A-Community-Approach-to-Dog-Bite-Prevention.aspx

**American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior**
avsabonline.org/resources/position-statements

**Canada Safety Council**
canadasafetycouncil.org/community-safety/safety-and-quick-fix

**Canadian Veterinary Medical Association**
canadianveterinarians.net/documents/legislation-concerning-dangerous-dogs-position-statement

**National Canine Research Council**
nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/dog-legislation/breed-specific-legislation-bsl-faq/
National Companion Animal Coalition
ncac-cnac.ca/59_Public_Do-Breed-Bans-Work.pdf

**HSUS Materials**

**Animal Sheltering**
animalsheltering.org/topics/laws-policies

**Pets for Life**
humanesociety.org/about/departments/pets-for-life/

**Pets are Welcome**
humanesociety.org/petsarewelcome

**Tethering**
humanesociety.org/tethering

**Other online resources**

**Humane Society International/Canada**
hsicanada.ca/alldogs

**The Humane Society of the United States**
humanesociety.org/bsl
humanesociety.org/breedspecific

**Best Friends Animal Society**
bestfriends.org/our-work/pit-bull-terrier-initiatives

**The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**
asPCA.org/animal-cruelty/dog-fighting/what-breed-specific-legislation

**Animal Farm Foundation**
animalfarmfoundation.org/pages/Breed-Specific-Legislation

**The Montreal SPCA**
saferkindercommunities.com
cutthechain.ca
Citations


ABOUT HSI/CANADA

Humane Society International/Canada is a leading force for animal protection, with active programs in companion animals, wildlife and habitat protection, marine mammal preservation, farm animal welfare and animals in research. HSI/Canada is proud to be a part of Humane Society International which, together with its partners, constitutes one of the world's largest animal protection organizations.