



## Breed Specific Legislation

Breed specific legislation (BSL) involves a group of laws passed that target a particular type of dog, most often pit bulls, and regulates their ability to reside in a particular community. 'Pit bull' does not describe a specific breed of dog, rather it groups a number of breeds and breed mixes into one category, which makes the number of dogs effected by BSL innumerable. Lawmakers most often begin to consider creating and enforcing BSL after attacks by a particular breed or breed mix in a community. The introduction of BSL enables lawmakers to create the illusion that they are truly addressing the problem and introduces a false sense of security to a community. The reality of BSL is that it is far from effective and incites fear and bias targeted at certain dogs, based purely on their appearance.

### **Why do lawmakers and communities consider BSL?**

BSL is typically considered after there is an incident involving a targeted breed in a specific community. These incidents typically generate an enormous amount of media attention, and communities look to lawmakers to prevent future incidents from occurring. Lawmakers often times look at BSL as the quickest and most efficient manner in which to address and assuage a community's fear. Unfortunately, breed bans historically have been entirely ineffective. Many countries, such as the United Kingdom, have had long-standing breed bans in effect, and have reported no change in the number of dog bites reported. The Netherlands enacted a breed ban from 1995 to 1998, and reported that the number of reported dog bites did decline, but that the change was due to education regarding dog ownership, not the ban. The ban has since been rescinded, with their reported dog bite numbers holding steady.

### **What does BSL do?**

The intent of BSL is to limit the presence of certain breeds in a community, as well as restricting the rights of individuals who do possess certain breeds of dogs, to increase public safety. Most communities that pass BSL will "grandfather in" dogs of the targeted breeds, if owners meet certain requirements. Typically, owners are given a set amount of time (usually 30 days) to register, spay/neuter, vaccinate, and microchip their dogs. Additionally, owners are then required to abide by certain guidelines in order to maintain possession of their dog, such as carry additional homeowner's insurance, keep their dog muzzled at all times while not on their property, etc. Once the legislation is enacted and the grandfathering-in period closes, no new dogs of the specified breeds can legally reside in that community. If a dog of the specified breed is picked up by animal control, the most common occurrence is euthanasia. In Denver, 1,075 dogs identified as pit bulls were euthanized from May 2005 through May 2006. Essentially, BSL promotes wide-spread euthanasia of certain breeds.

### **Why is BSL focused on pit bulls?**

Pit bulls have received wide-spread media attention following a number of high profile incidents. The media portrays pit bulls as erratic, unpredictable, dangerous animals that are always involved in incidents involving a dog harming another dog or person. In the current climate, you rarely hear about other breeds of dogs displaying similar tendencies, or being involved in similar incidents. The reality is that any dog, regardless of breed, has the capacity to display such undesirable tendencies, if raised and handled carelessly. Pit bulls have been effectively stigmatized and are now under constant scrutiny, resulting in an oppressive climate of fear and lack of education. Other breeds, such as Rottweilers, German Shepherds, Chow Chows and Doberman Pinschers have been subjected to similar discrimination in the past.

### **Is BSL effective?**

No! There is no evidence that breed bans or breed restrictions have any impact on the occurrence of dog bites, dog attacks, etc.

### **Why?**

The primary reason for BSL's ineffectiveness is the simple fact that dog owners play the biggest hand in determining the temperament of their dogs and BSL regulates dogs, not dog owners.

Additionally, breed identification is not an exact science and is impossible to identify with absolute certainty a dog's breed without knowledge of its lineage. BSL identifies "pit bulls" and "pit bull mixes" as restricted breeds, but what does this really mean? American Pit Bull Terriers, American Staffordshire Terriers, and Staffordshire Bull Terriers are typically included in this classification, but what about the rest of the bully breeds? Any dog that has a wide head, a broad chest, and shorter fur is eligible for classification. Once a dog has been identified as a restricted breed, it falls to the owner to prove that the dog is not one of these specified breeds. Without proof of pedigree, how is this possible? The end result is that dogs that may or may not belong to a certain breed are stigmatized, based solely on suspected parentage.

### **What are the results of BSL?**

The responsibility of enforcing BSL falls to animal control and shelters, systems that are already understaffed, under-funded and overwhelmed. BSL puts additional burden on shelters that are already overcrowded due to lack of mandatory spay/neuter requirements and pet overpopulation.

Prejudice and stereotypes are enforced and legislatively encouraged. Fear and lack of awareness is promoted as breeds are blamed for actions that result from human decisions.

It only becomes a matter of time before another breed is considered suspect, perpetuating a lack of education and a displacement of blame from the dog owner to the dog.

## What are alternatives to BSL?

**Enforce leash laws** – Leash law violations are innumerable and rarely are penalties enforced. Until we are a society comprised entirely of responsible dog owners, individuals should not be allowed to determine who is put at risk by a dog off-leash.

**Establish and enforce non-breed specific dangerous owner/dangerous dog ordinances** – All dog owners must be held accountable for their dogs' actions, regardless of breed. We must acknowledge that breed alone does not determine a dog's propensity toward aggression.

**Establish mandatory spay/neuter regulations** – Millions of animals are euthanized as a result of pet overpopulation, and now BSL is contributing to the staggering numbers.

**Increase funding for animal abuse and neglect investigation and enforcement** – Millions of dogs are abused and neglected in this country. These dogs do not end up as friendly dogs on leashes. These dogs are frightened, unsocialized to humans and frequently to other animals, and are operating purely on survival instincts. These dogs represent the ultimate human failure and are at the center of attention-generating incidents.

**Stop dog fighting** – Despite federal and state legislation, dog fighting is still alive and well in this country, which means horrible atrocities are still inflicted upon certain dogs in the name of sport and dogs are still being bred to participate in this activity.

### *What is dog fighting?*

Dogs that are bred for fighting are trained to fight to death or until the other dog refuses to participate. Electrical shocking devices, sharpened axe handles, etc. are used to force dogs to continue fighting. They fight in enclosed pens for anywhere from one to three hours and wagers are placed on the fights. Most dogs die during the fight, or hours following due to injuries sustained, shock, and/or dehydration. Dogs are frequently left in dumpsters or on the street following fights. It is not uncommon for children to attend dog fights, at the encouragement of parents or other adults.

### *How are dogs trained to fight?*

Fighting dogs are frequently starved to make them more aggressive. Endurance is increased by using treadmills or tying a dog's lead to a car bumper. Dogs are often given steroids or cocaine to increase aggressiveness. Smaller animals, such as cats, rabbits, or smaller dogs, are used as bait during training.

The amount of human effort needed to create a fighting dog is enormous. Dogs are not born aggressive, but can become aggressive if subjected to the atrocities involved in dog fighting. Abuse and neglect inflicted by owners breed fear and aggression in dogs.

**Educate, educate, educate** – Spread the word about responsible dog ownership and take accountability for the impact we as humans have on the outcomes of animals' lives.

### **What do I do as a responsible dog owner?**

Spay/neuter your dog

Never allow your dog to free roam

Always leash your dog when not on your property

Provide adequate daily exercise and companionship

Enroll in training classes or provide training at home

Engage your dog in constant supervised socialization with other people and other pets

### **Additional resources**

<http://www.stopbsl.com/>

<http://www.happypitbull.com/>

<http://pbrc.net/>

[http://www.hsus.org/pets/issues\\_affecting\\_our\\_pets/dangerous\\_dogs.html](http://www.hsus.org/pets/issues_affecting_our_pets/dangerous_dogs.html)