



**Humane  
World for  
Animals™**

Formerly called the  
Humane Society of the United States  
and Humane Society International



# Repealing Breed-Specific Legislation

**A smarter, evidence-based approach to dog policy**



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Download a free copy of this toolkit, with links to resources, at [humanepro.org/BSLtoolkit](https://humanepro.org/BSLtoolkit).



# Introduction

**The pet-keeping culture in this country has changed dramatically in recent decades.** From daycare for dogs to pet health insurance, Americans are investing a tremendous amount of time, energy and love in their four-legged companions.

Nearly two-thirds of American households have pets—that’s 89.7 million pet dogs (APPA, 2024). What’s more, 97% of all pet owners consider their pets to be members of the family (Pew Research, 2023). Indicators such as the number of dogs sleeping in their human’s bed—more than half (Harris Poll, 2015)—and the amount spent annually on pets—nearly \$152 billion in 2024 (APPA, 2024)—illustrate that most Americans love and care for pets appropriately and successfully.

That said, there are still huge systemic threats causing animals to lose their homes, with over 6 million animals entering U.S. animal shelters every year (Shelter Animals Count, 2024).

For dogs, one such threat is breed-specific legislation and related policies that restrict dog ownership by perceived breed. These laws create unnecessary obstacles and hardships for dog owners and their pets, often forcing families to relinquish beloved companions who have done nothing wrong.

Central to the problem is the concept of the “pit bull.” Ask a hundred people to define what a “pit bull” is, and you will likely get a hundred different answers.

In recent decades, the term has expanded to include mixed-breed dogs who possess supposed “pit bull characteristics,” such as blocky heads, white chest markings or brindle coats. Yet those same physical traits appear in more than 20 breeds of dog, and the latest genetic research indicates that many mixed-breed dogs

identified as “pit mixes” do not have any ancestry from breeds commonly thought of as “pit bulls.”

With an estimated 90 million dogs living in the U.S. and no standardized system for breed identification or registration, there is no accurate way to determine how many dogs are truly “pit bull-types.” BSL relies on visual identification and the flawed assumption that breed determines behavior. This notion has been repeatedly discredited by science and animal welfare experts.

Thankfully, no state regulates dogs based on breed, but a number of cities, counties and municipalities have bans and restrictions. Despite strong evidence that the vast majority of people with dogs are managing them well, local governments across the country still ban, regulate, or place additional restrictions on certain breeds or types of dogs. Rather than basing public policy on facts and pet-keeping trends, BSL is based on fear and myth.

Humane World for Animals opposes breed-based laws and policies and works with policymakers around the country to implement smarter policies for safer communities. In recent years, many municipalities have repealed their breed-based laws and adopted breed-neutral approaches to animal management.

This toolkit is 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 Humane World state directors, local shelters and rescue groups, community leaders, pet resource organizations and families with dogs. By forming a unified coalition, we can eliminate the destruction caused by breed-specific legislation.



# Learn the facts about breed-specific legislation

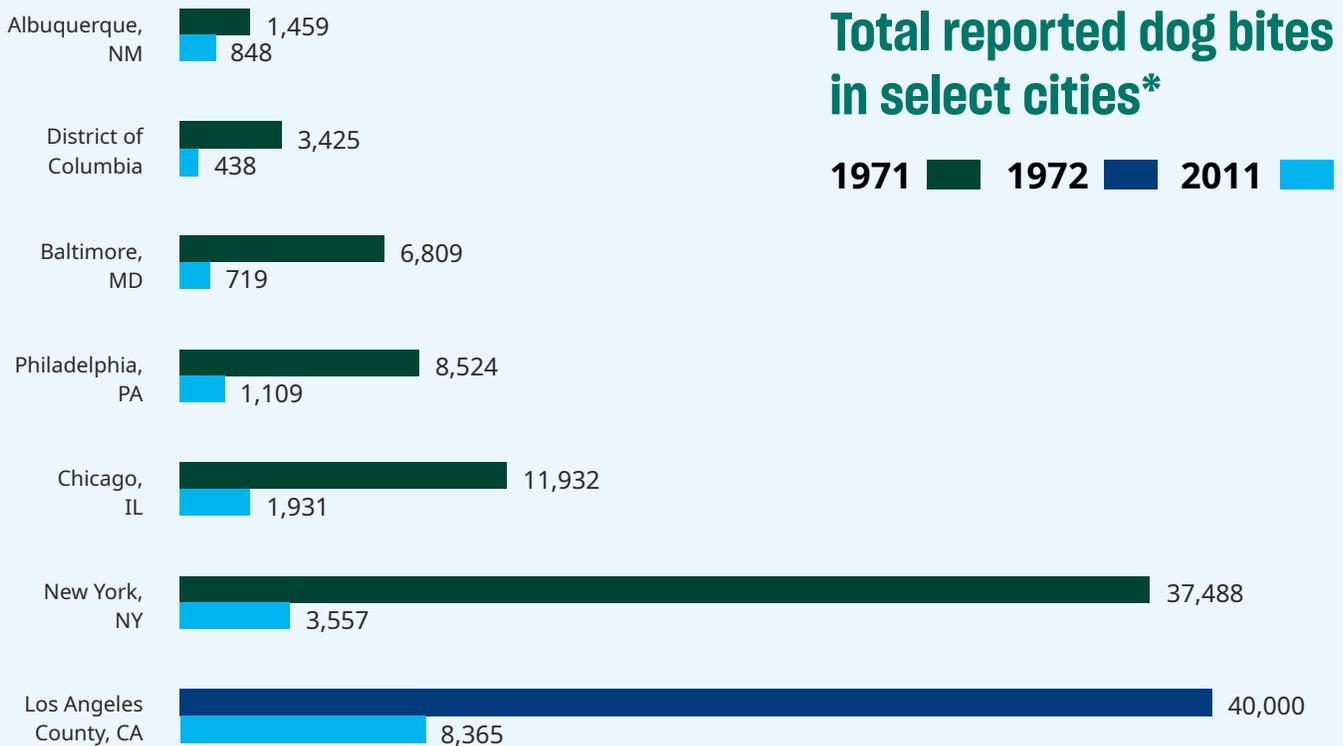
## Dog bites are rare, and BSL doesn't stop them

Despite widespread and often sensationalized media coverage on dog bites and attacks, there's no dog bite epidemic in this country. The reality is that most dogs never bite, and reported dog bites have significantly decreased across the country since the 1970s (NCRC, 2016). The chart below, compiled by the National Canine Research Council, illustrates the decline in reported dog bites in various U.S. cities.

Peer-reviewed research has shown that banning specific breeds would require removing an unrealistically large number of dogs to prevent even one serious bite injury. Because serious

bites are rare and not concentrated in any one breed, breed-specific laws do not meaningfully reduce risk and fail to improve public safety (Patronek, 2010).

Additionally, just as there is no standardized registration system to track how many and what breeds of dogs are living in the U.S., there is no centralized reporting system for dog bite incidents. The limited data that does exist is collected locally, typically by hospitals, law enforcement or animal service agencies after an incident occurs. Collection methods vary widely, are often subjective and frequently omit key circumstance variables. Breed is usually recorded based on visual identification, which is highly unreliable.



\*Data compiled by the National Canine Research Council

These flawed reports contribute to misleading conclusions that some breeds are inherently more dangerous than others. Furthermore, because the actual population of a breed within any given locality is unknown, accurate incident rates by breed can't be determined, even if visual breed identification were accurate, which it rarely is.

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. 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 promote short-sighted, inhumane and wasteful ideas that offer nothing to prevent dog bites and attacks. The idea that it's possible to ban a breed of dog from a community is out of touch with reality.

## Dog bite-related fatalities

### Understanding the true risk factors behind dog bite fatalities

In 2021, there were 51 verified dog bite-related fatalities (DBRFs) in the U.S.; they occurred within a human population of 335 million and a canine population estimated at 83 million (NCRC, 2023). Every fatality is tragic, and efforts should be made to prevent dog bites and fatalities from occurring. However, banning a breed of dog won't protect people. To help prevent DBRFs, we need to understand the data.

A comprehensive study on DBRFs published by the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* in 2013 identified multiple, co-occurring factors in all cases, and breed wasn't one of them (Patronek et al., 2013). In fact, the study states that DBRFs are multifactorial and there's no single factor responsible for these events. In cases where the breed(s) of dogs could be reliably identified, more than 20 breeds and at least two mixed-breed dogs were identified.

Based on this analysis of all DBRFs known to have occurred over a 10-year period, the researchers identified a co-occurrence of multiple, controllable factors, of which breed was not included:

- No able-bodied person was present to intervene (87.1%).
- The victim had no familiar relationship with the dog(s) (85.2%).
- The dog(s) were intact (84.4%).
- A victim's compromised ability, whether because of age or physical condition, impacted their ability to manage their interactions with the dog(s) (77.4%).
- The dog was not socialized as part of the family and instead was kept as a "resident dog," often isolated from regular, positive human interactions (76.2%).



- The dog had a history of roaming or risky/dangerous behavior (37.5%).
- The dog(s) were abused or neglected (21.1%).

Four or more of these factors were present in 75.5% of the cases. You can read more about the study in *Final Report on Dog Bite-Related Fatalities* (NCRC, 2018).

We sympathize with victims of dog bites and attacks and their families. The tragedy and injury they have endured motivates us even more to advocate against policies we know won't work. BSL not only fails to achieve public safety goals, it moves communities further away from safety because it provides a false sense of security and wastes critical resources. A number of DBRFs have occurred in jurisdictions with BSL already on the books, proving it doesn't increase community safety and is a distraction from addressing more fundamental laws.

As the American Veterinary Medical Association notes in its report on community dog-bite prevention, "singling out one or two 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" (AVMA, 2001).

### Access to veterinary care reduces risk and improves community safety

Data collected from Pets for Life, a program of Humane World for Animals, demonstrates the strong connection between access to veterinary care and spay/neuter rates. PFL operates in more than 60 communities across the country. In each community, PFL focuses on areas with high concentrations of people experiencing poverty and areas that are historically underserved.

PFL has collected the same data from people and pets in each of the communities, resulting in a national dataset that demonstrates how a lack of access to veterinary and pet care

services, information and resources impacts the health and wellness of a community's pet population. For example:

- Of the hundreds of thousands of pets served through the PFL program, the incidence rate of unaltered pets in underserved communities is 87% of pets overall, meaning that nearly 9 in 10 pets were unaltered at the time of the first meeting with PFL team members.
- Of the pets served, 70% hadn't previously been seen by a veterinarian.
- Of the unaltered pets healthy enough for surgery, two-thirds were subsequently spayed or neutered through PFL. This demonstrates that low sterilization rates aren't due to a lack of interest but rather a lack of access (Humane World, 2014).

**When people have access to pet care services, dog-related injuries are less likely to occur.**

### Bad laws have high costs

Humane World opposes breed-specific legislation because it is ineffective, costly and harmful. By focusing on a dog's appearance rather than behavior, BSL misdirects limited public resources away from proven safety strategies, such as enforcing leash laws, supporting owners with access to behavioral and veterinary resources, and educating the public about dog ownership and behavior. Breed-based restrictions do not address root causes of dog-related incidents but rather take beloved dogs away from families who love them without improving public safety or animal welfare.

No jurisdiction (state or local) with BSL has ever been able to demonstrate a measurable increase in public safety or a significant reduction in the population of banned dog breeds. While it is now rare to see new BSL imposed, communities continue to use these laws, creating significant financial costs for taxpayers and emotional costs for community members.

**Financial costs to cities and counties:** Breed-specific laws are expensive to implement and enforce.

A 2020 study by the University of Denver in Colorado found that enforcing Denver's BSL cost the city nearly \$6 million, plus an estimated \$107 million in lost revenue from pet care and supplies due to people avoiding the city (Hawes, 2020). After 30 years, the ban was overturned in 2020.

Similarly, Overland Park (the second largest city in Kansas) enforced restrictions on pit bull-type dogs from 1986 until 2021.

A study found that enforcement cost the city more than \$842,000 since 2011, averaging approximately \$107,200 per dog, with no measurable impact on public safety or health (Dunham & Assocs., 2021). The city also lost up to \$8.5 million in annual economic activity and roughly 105 full-time equivalent jobs tied to veterinary care, grooming and other pet services.

**Costs to animal shelters:** BSL places substantial strain on already overburdened and under-resourced animal shelters and service departments.

Dogs impounded under breed-specific laws face limited adoption options because other potential adopters in the community are also prohibited from adopting them. As a result, these dogs must either be transported out of the community or may be euthanized for lack of an available home. Each of these outcomes brings an emotional and operational toll on shelters and employees.

Law enforcement officers and animal control professionals are already stretched thin, tasked with protecting public safety and enforcing the law. Asking officers or animal shelter professionals to determine a dog's breed by sight alone is unreliable, inefficient and unfair.

Studies show that even experts struggle to identify breeds accurately. One study showed that professionals correctly identified a dog's DNA-confirmed breed less than half the time (Voith et al., 2013). Another found that shelter staff misidentified pit bull-type dogs in the majority of cases (Olson et al., 2015). With most dogs being of mixed ancestry, enforcement based on appearance is simply unreliable.

**Emotional and community cost:** Beyond financial and operational costs, BSL causes immense emotional damage to families and communities.

The fear of having a beloved dog taken away may cause families to hide their dog, limiting their ability to provide adequate exercise, socialization, veterinary care or other critical services—the very factors that are most effective in preventing serious dog-related incidents.

Law enforcement agencies work hard to build trust with members of their community, investing time and resources in programs that strengthen these relationships. BSL undermines those efforts by requiring officers to pry into the lives of responsible dog owners and potentially separate families. When municipalities take a punitive approach toward managing animals, rifts between animal service providers, law enforcement and pet owners can arise, sowing distrust within a community.

Many of the jurisdictions with the longest-standing BSL openly admit that it doesn't work and that it has harmed community members, dogs and those required to enforce the law—all without delivering on the promised safety benefits.

## Is BSL about dogs, or is it really about people?

BSL is not only ineffective and impractical to enforce, but it is also inequitable. We can't talk about BSL without talking about its origins as a method of penalizing communities of color who may love and care for pit bull-type dogs, particularly in neighborhoods in which gentrification occurs.

In 2016, four years before Denver, Colorado, repealed its longstanding breed ban, journalist Brooke Binkowski suggested that BSL is a type of code language where specific types of dogs are a substitute for deeper, systemic issues.

*“Looking into the data on breed bans turns up an interesting finding: each region that has enacted breed-specific legislation of some sort appears to have also experienced significant, if not dramatic demographic changes over a relatively short period of time. For example, Denver, Colorado (a city that has one of the toughest breed bans in the United States—and routinely ranks among the highest in the nation in dog bites) has had breed-specific legislation in place since 1989, not long after the ‘energy bust’ and associated migration dramatically changed the population of the city.”*

—Brooke Binkowski (Binkowski, 2016)

Bronwen Dickey, author of *Pit Bull: Battle over an American Icon*, doesn't 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 ‘decaninized,’ their owners have been dehumanized.”*

—Bronwen Dickey (Dickey, 2016)

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 behavior 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.”

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” (Balko, 2016).

Whether or not BSL is introduced as a way to target owners, the enforcement of BSL and pet bans disproportionately affects marginalized communities. For example, one study found that while most landlords in predominantly white neighborhoods allowed pets, less than half did so in majority African American neighborhoods (Rose et al., 2020). Another found that pit bull-type dogs are more commonly associated with Black and Hispanic families and face the most housing restrictions (Linder, 2018). These biases are carried into enforcement, deepening existing disparities.

## The problem with visual identification of dog breeds

Breed-specific legislation relies on a dog's appearance rather than behavior, despite extensive evidence that visual breed identification is unreliable. Many different breeds, mixes and even Labrador retrievers are often mislabeled as “pit bulls.”

Research has shown that behavior has little to no correlation with a dog's breed and that identifying a dog's breed based on appearance is deeply flawed and puts a tremendous strain on animal shelters, where dogs from good homes are seized and often euthanized despite showing no history of aggression. Every dog should be evaluated as an individual rather than judged by appearance, and with proper care, sterilization and introductions, even dogs once bred for fighting can be loyal, loving companions.

This reliance on appearance is especially problematic given how broadly and inconsistently the “pit bull” label is applied. The number of Americans who self-identify as pit bull owners has increased significantly in recent years.

Banfield Pet Hospital (the largest veterinary clinic chain in the country) reports that the number of pit bull-owning clients rose 47% between 2003 and 2013. A separate analysis of national veterinary records lists the American pit bull terrier among the top three most popular breeds in 28 states and among the top five in 34 states.

While it is impossible to determine how many of these dogs are pedigreed members of breeds commonly referred to as pit

bulls and how many are actually mixed breeds, the data illustrates just how prolific and imprecise the “pit bull” label has become and how many families deeply value and responsibly care for dogs labeled this way.

Over half the estimated 90 million American pet dogs are mixed breeds. BSL cannot be effectively enforced because it's impossible to determine a dog's breeds based on their physical appearance. What people often mean by using the term “pit bull” is one of three breeds: American pit bull terrier, American Staffordshire terrier and Staffordshire bull terrier. Other dogs frequently lumped into the “pit bull” category include bulldogs, boxers, presa canarios, cane corsos, mastiffs and various mixes of all of these.

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-type may turn out to be a Labra-poodle-terri-hund. While DNA testing underscores why breed-specific policy is unworkable, the tests aren't 100% reliable. This reinforces the broader point that breed-based policies are imprecise and an inappropriate foundation for public policy.

Multiple studies have been conducted on breed identification in animal shelters. Four Florida shelters—Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services, the Jacksonville Humane Society, Marion County Animal Services and Tallahassee Animal Services—participated in a study (Olson et al., 2015) in which 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 comprised at least 12.5% of the breed signature.

One of the more bizarre problems with policies that target “pit bulls” is that the breed doesn't technically exist. There's no agreed upon legal definition of a pit bull, and a dog called a pit bull isn't recognized by any kennel club, which is why laws often attempt to spell out a patchwork of physical traits or breed labels or require that enforcement agents do the same, further ensuring inconsistency and inequity.

### Recent progress to repeal BSL

Some of the jurisdictions with the longest standing BSL have taken steps to repeal and replace these harmful policies.

After many years of advocacy, in 2025, the Prince George's County, Maryland, County Council voted in favor of ending the decades-old ban on pit bull-type dogs.



50% American bulldog  
25% American Staffordshire terrier  
9.28% Pembroke Welsh corgi  
7.97% Irish wolfhound



25% German shepherd  
25% Staffordshire bull terrier  
13.36% Weimaraner  
7.29% German wirehaired pointer



25% rottweiler  
12.5% boxer  
12.5% German shorthaired pointer  
11.09% Manchester terrier



25% American Staffordshire terrier  
25% collie  
21.41% black Russian terrier  
19.86% Norwegian buhund



25% American Staffordshire terrier  
25% Dogue de Bordeaux  
3.66% Irish terrier  
2.17% Dandie Dinmont terrier



25% American Staffordshire terrier  
25% boxer  
25% soft-coated wheaten terrier  
18.66% Great Dane



50% Catahoula leopard dog  
25% Siberian husky  
9.94% briard  
5.07 Airedale terrier



25% basset hound  
25% American Staffordshire terrier  
25% chow chow  
25% English cocker spaniel



25% American Staffordshire terrier  
25% Staffordshire bull terrier  
8.83% flat-coated retriever  
3.14% Irish wolfhound



25% boxer  
25% Alaskan malamute  
21.95% Sealyham terrier  
19.67% pointer

PHOTOS BY: MICHAEL CRANDALL. SOURCE: MADDIE'S SHELTER MEDICINE PROGRAM. SOME PERCENTAGES MAY NOT ADD UP TO 100% DUE TO TRACE AMOUNTS OF DNA NOT SHOWN. ALL ANIMALS MAGAZINE, MARCH/APRIL 2013

Rodney Taylor, former associate director of the animal management division in Prince George's County, knows firsthand about the cost of BSL in his community. At a state legislative hearing in 2012, he had this to say regarding the county's breed ban:

"One of the most difficult challenges we have as an organization is going to someone's house, knocking on their door, and seeing their American pit bull terrier sitting in their living room watching television with the family, and have to take it out. Where the dog has done nothing wrong, no problems, but is just because of its breed, he has to be removed. What a challenge.

Challenge No. 2 is the mixed pit bull. As the chief, I've been doing this now for 32 years in the field; it's still a challenge for me to be able to look at a breed of a dog and go, 'Are you more pit bull than American bulldog? Or presa canario? Any other breed?' That is a challenge because it puts a death sentence on some animals that haven't done anything wrong."

*“When I started here years ago, we called mixed-breed dogs mutts. Now we just call them all pit bulls.”*

—**Worker, Animal Care and Control Centers NYC**

Denver, Colorado, overturned its BSL in 2021. After the Denver City Council passed an ordinance repealing the ban in 2020, the then-mayor vetoed the measure, sending the issue back to voters the next year. As a compromise, the approved ballot measure replaced the ban with a “step-down” approach that allows certain dogs to reside in the city if they are registered.

The effectiveness of this approach remains questionable, and it is not recommended as a best practice. The current law continues to strain county resources without demonstrably improving public safety or outcomes for Denver residents or their pets. Instead, it adds layers of bureaucracy to the enforcement process, diverting attention from addressing genuinely dangerous dogs and perpetuating many of the same discriminatory challenges associated with traditional BSL. Those responsible for administering the program continue to emphasize the importance of focusing on behavior rather than breed.

As Melanie Sobel, director of animal protection for the Denver Animal Shelter, states: “Breed-specific legislation (BSL) acts as collective punishment by targeting, restricting or banning entire dog breeds based on appearance rather than individual behavior. It punishes responsible owners for the actions of a few and fails to address the root cause of dangerous dogs. More effective public policies are breed-neutral, ‘dangerous dog’ laws that focus on the behavior of individual dogs and the accountability of their owners.”

## 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.

### 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 behavior of both dog owners and dogs, and to repeal any breed discriminatory or breed specific provisions.” (ABA Resolution, 2012)

### American Kennel Club

“The AKC strongly opposes any legislation that determines a dog to be ‘dangerous’ based on specific breeds or phenotypic classes of dogs.”

“Regulations that target specific breeds force law enforcement officials to focus their valuable time on breed identification. This



task requires expert knowledge of the individual breeds and can be compounded when the law includes mixed breeds. It is very difficult for public officials to enforce such provisions in a fair and effective manner.”

#### **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—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.”

#### **National Animal Care and Control Association**

“Breed-specific legislation (BSL) or breed discrimination is ineffective as it fails to enhance public safety, is expensive to enforce, and violates the property rights of dog owners. We want our communities to be protected against dangerous dogs—and we want abused dogs to be protected from reckless owners. The focus of any policy should be on the behavior of the dog and the behavior of the owners.”

#### **National Black Caucus of State Legislators**

“National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) denounces breed specific legislation, including breed specific policies, which apply to specific dog breed or dog breed mixes and believes that such laws are discriminatory in nature ... the NBCSL calls for all states, local governments, government agencies, and/or quasi-governmental entities to repeal any and all breed specific legislation or policies.”

#### **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 behavior, 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.”

#### **Obama 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.”

#### **State Farm Insurance**

“We do not ask nor do we care what breed of dog is owned by a person,” says Heather Paul, public affairs specialist. “So when we are writing homeowner’s insurance, rental insurance, or renewing policies, it is nowhere in our questions what breed of dog is owned.”

#### **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

The CDC emphasizes that the available data are insufficient and unreliable for drawing breed-specific conclusions, making breed-based policy ineffective and unsupported. The long-cited study on dog bite-related fatalities identified several flaws, including difficulties in determining breed population data.

#### **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development**

HUD recognizes that breed is an irrelevant factor to ensuring the general public health and safety of a housing community by asserting that all breeds of domestic dogs can be assistance animals regardless of any state or local breed bans. HUD states: “Breed, size and weight limitations may not be applied to an assistance animal. A determination that an assistance animal poses a direct threat of harm to others or would cause substantial physical damage to the property of others must be based on an individualized assessment that relies on objective evidence about the specific animal’s actual conduct—not on mere speculation or fear about the types of harm or damage an animal may cause and not on evidence about harm or damage that other animals have caused.”

## **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.

#### **U.S. Department of Justice**

Similarly, the DOJ requires that places of public accommodation grant service dogs access to the premises regardless of breed. Municipalities that prohibit specific breeds of dogs must make an exception for a service animal of a prohibited breed, unless the dog poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others. Under the “direct threat” provisions of the Americans with Disabilities

Act, local jurisdictions need to determine, “on a case-by-case basis, whether a particular service animal can be excluded based on that particular animal’s actual behavior or history, but they may not exclude a service animal because of fears or generalizations about how an animal or breed might behave.”

### BSL is on the decline; so where is BSL?

Fortunately, more people and their elected officials are learning why breed bans and restrictions don’t make sense, and BSL is on the decline. In recent years, multiple states have passed laws prohibiting BSL on the local level and many municipalities have replaced BSL with breed-neutral policies. Repealing BSL hasn’t resulted in more dog bites in these communities. In fact, after Ohio repealed its statewide breed-based law in 2012, State Farm Insurance reported a decrease in dog-related claims in the state.

In other words, there is no



state-level BSL, and all remaining BSL exists in local ordinances of cities, counties, townships, etc. The following maps illustrate the current landscape of BSL in the U.S. The first map displays the number of municipalities in each state that contain breed-specific provisions in their ordinances. The second map (page 13) shows how these local ordinances correlate with state laws.

### Degrees of BSL

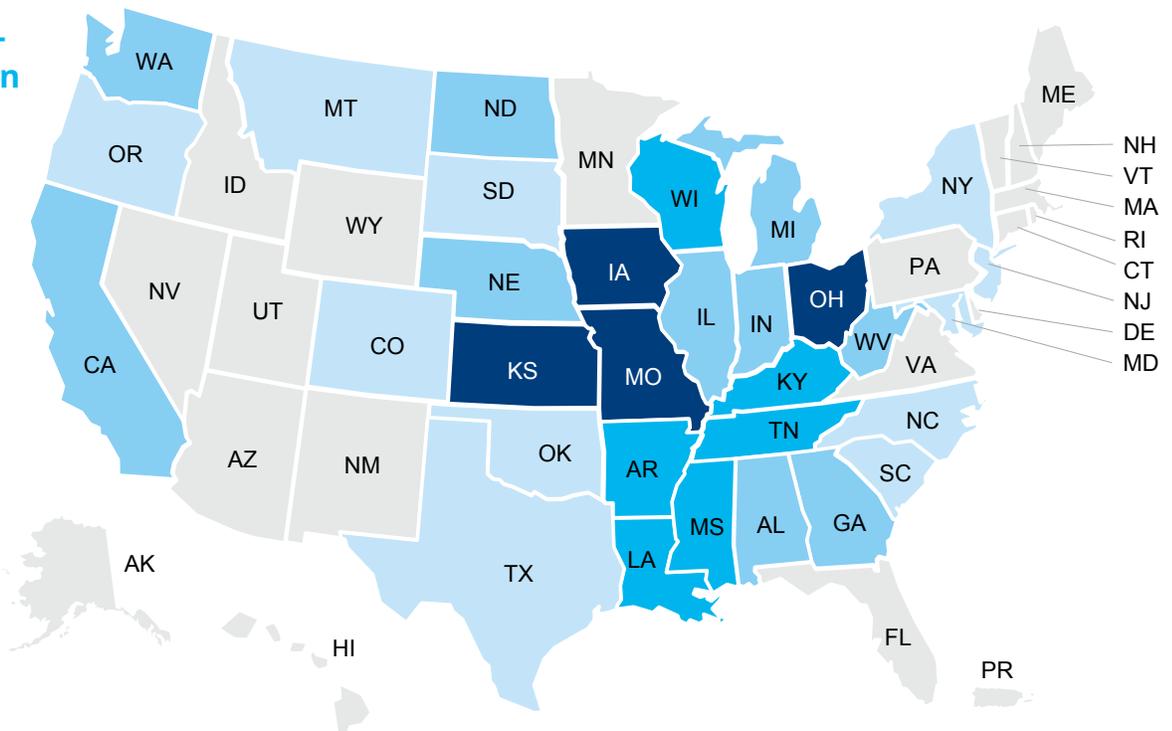
In the map below, states are separated into categories based on the amount of BSL that exists within the state. Lighter colors indicate fewer breed-specific ordinances, while darker colors indicate more breed-specific ordinances.

As you can see, a handful of states have a significant number of municipalities that ban or restrict dogs by breed. They are Ohio, Iowa, Missouri and Kansas.

These four states 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. States like this create negative consequences for residents because they limit relocation options for personal or professional reasons within the state, hinder lifesaving abilities for animal adoption organizations, and undoubtedly result in dogs who

### Degrees of breed-specific legislation

Updated January 2026







# Repeal a breed-specific ordinance

## Assess the ordinance's history and research the issue

Take the time to look into the history of your ordinance; it will pay off later when you are talking to officials about your proposed repeal. Connect with residents and animal welfare organizations to learn how BSL hurts families and other animals by taking up resources in the community. Here are some questions to consider:

- When was the law passed?
- Was it motivated by a specific incident?
- When it was passed, what other motivations may have existed?
- What is the community like? Is it progressive or conservative? Research community demographics.
- Who were proponents and who opposed? Do they still?
- Is there data that it has improved safety in the community? Is there data that it has increased shelter intake or euthanasia or separated families from their dogs?
- Do banned dogs still live in the community?
- Who does the ordinance affect?
- How is it being enforced, and what are the protocols for identifying these dogs?

Collecting a wide range of perspectives and data will help you speak with authority about this issue and how it impacts all members of the community.

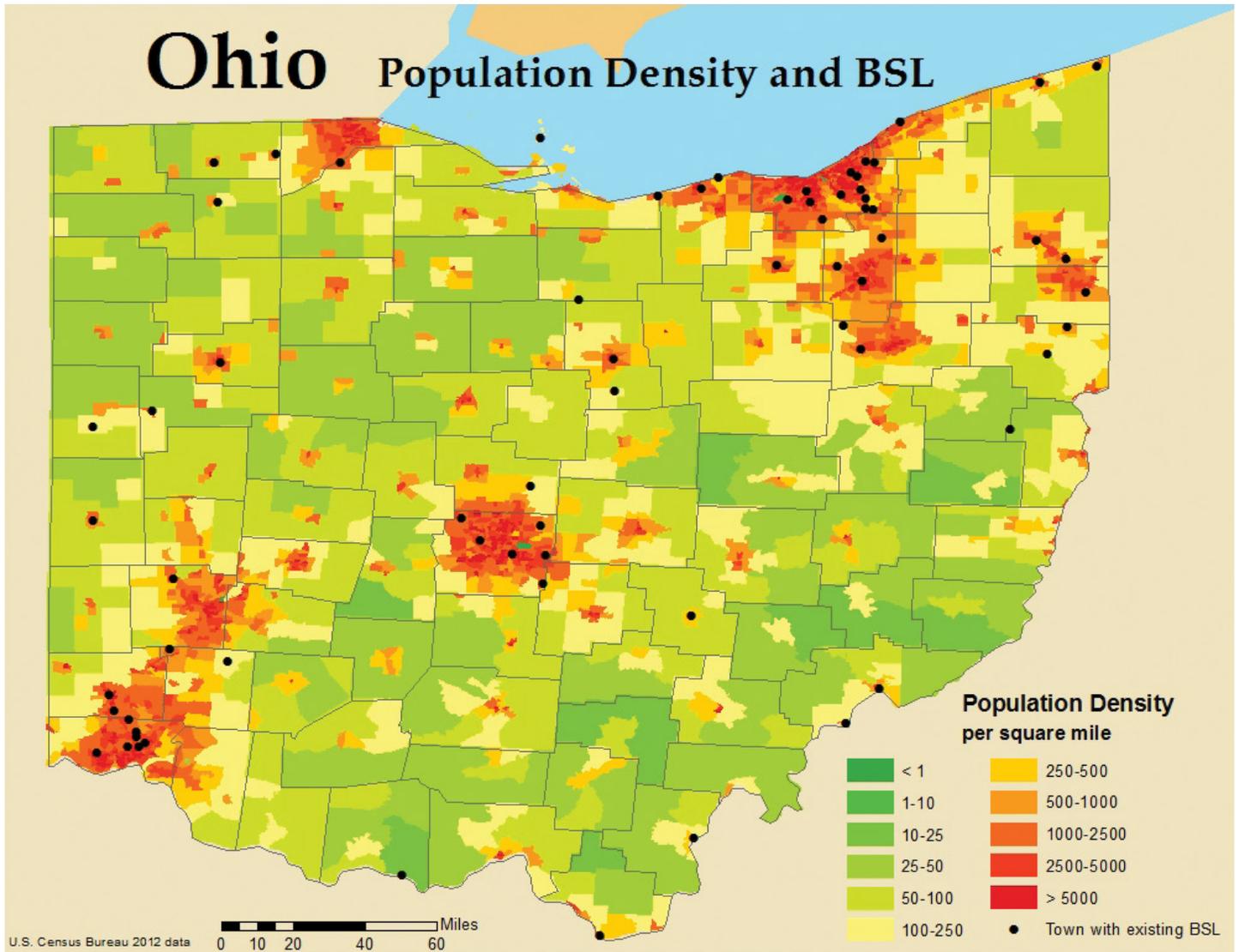
If a neighboring community has recently repealed its BSL, you may want to begin by researching the repeal effort. Information about why the town made the change can often influence your public officials. Having testimonials from those officials is even more powerful.

Draft talking points to keep handy as you promote the idea of

a repeal effort with your local city council or county commission and the public at large. You can include quotes from experts, arguments for public safety and effects on the local shelter, as found in previous sections of this toolkit. For sample talking points, see page 21. It's 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.

It can be helpful to get a big-picture view of BSL in your state by creating a map similar to the one on the following page. It illustrates the patchwork of laws that existed in Ohio as of February 2026 and how they can potentially affect human populations and activities. You can see that the BSL ordinances in place are largely centered around the cities where the human density is highest. A substantial number of ordinances are located in the less densely populated areas of the state as well. Visuals like this can help draw perspective on BSL and raise pertinent questions. For example:

- Do these ordinances limit people's access to pet care resources, behavioral support 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 veterinary and behavioral care?
- How do these ordinances compare with shelter intake and euthanasia in the state?
- Do these ordinances prevent families from relocating within the state?
- Do these ordinances limit economic or employment opportunities for residents?
- How do these ordinances compare with human demographics in the state?



## Mobilize within your community

Getting a local ordinance 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're 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 residents have questions and need information; the powerful hype around pit bull-type dogs has influenced many people. Center your messages on commonalities, such as wanting to live in a community where people are helped to care for their dogs safely and wanting nondiscriminatory approaches to addressing problems. Be open to hearing other perspectives; work to reach new audiences and

avoid "preaching to the choir."

If dog-related incidents have occurred in your region, approach them with empathy and respect, acknowledging that these communities have experienced trauma. It's not our role to invalidate those experiences, rather we can work together to support policies grounded in science rather than fear.

It's extremely important to connect with animal care and control agencies, private shelters and rescues in your community. These organizations feel the impacts of BSL because BSL can increase 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's 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 that work to 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:

Families and individuals with dogs who are affected by the ordinance	Their testimony on how this has impacted their family will be critical. Create ways for them to be engaged while protecting their anonymity.
Families and individuals who own dogs of all breeds and types	No one wants to be told what kind of dog they can or cannot have—BSL is a slippery slope of encroachment into privacy and property rights.
Animal advocates, aside from those mentioned above	Most animal advocates understand the impacts BSL has on animals and will want to support your effort.
Veterinary professionals	They may be called upon to provide breed identification in BSL enforcement or may have clients who are afraid to seek veterinary care for their pit bull-type dog. Veterinarians want to help all pets in their community and many understand the flaws in visual breed identification methods.
Behavior professionals	Behavior experts know firsthand how a lack of socialization and training can lead to behavior challenges. Engage them as experts in conversations about dog behavior.
Community safety interest groups and advocates outside of the animal welfare field	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.
Dog breed groups, such as the local AKC chapter	These groups tend to disagree with BSL.

**When Montreal proposed BSL,**

the Montreal SPCA took a stand and refused to enforce it as part of its service contract with local municipalities. Benoit Tremblay, then-executive director, said: “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.”

Just as it is important to connect with your allies, it can be helpful to meet with those who support BSL to see what their concerns are and whether any of them can be mitigated. Sometimes just sending a letter to the leadership of a local opposition group or hosting a listening session for concerned individuals can go a long way in opening respectful dialogue.

**Get to know your elected officials**

The local legislative process varies around 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, or you may be able to find information on the city or county website.

Elected officials tend to take constituents’ interests seriously, so try talking to your own council member, county commissioner or alderperson first. As much as we’d like the people we vote for to agree with us, this is not always the case. 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 care and control agency or nonprofit humane society can point you toward a sympathetic decision-maker.

Once you’ve identified an elected official, request a meeting with them to discuss the potential repeal effort.

**Prepare for the meeting:**

- Gather a small group of your allies to accompany you. Having an animal care and control officer or a shelter professional present at the meeting can often be very beneficial. Determine the message you wish to convey before the 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 a follow-up letter. Include brief personal stories or experiences that demonstrate why this issue is important to you or the group. Finally, keep your message brief and clear.

## Repeal a breed-specific ordinance

- List all arguments for and against BSL and develop responses. This will help you to avoid being put on the spot. You can also 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 their district?
  - How will the proposed language solve the issue?
  - Who supports the proposal?
  - Who opposes the proposal?
  - Will the proposal have a significant positive or negative fiscal impact?
  - How have other states and cities dealt with the issue?
  - Is there opportunity for positive media (or negative)?
  - How does their 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 BSL 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. Don't make up answers. Acknowledge what you don't know. Make a note of the questions you couldn't 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 note that restates

your key points, responds to outstanding questions and reiterates any commitments made.

## Identify ordinance changes

It's important for you to be familiar with the ordinance language you want changed.

Some BSL is written into law as a standalone section of the ordinance; other times, it's woven into one or more sections of the code. BSL can include an outright ban on ownership or additional restrictions placed on certain breeds of dogs such as requirements that certain dogs wear muzzles in public or that certain dogs must be spayed or neutered or their owners will face a fine.

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

Your proposal may include a strict nullification of breed-specific language in your city code by striking a standalone section, or it might include a more detailed set of changes to "breed-neutralize" the code. Depending on the current ordinance, you may want to include recommendations for effective dog management as well.

If the ordinance already has dog management regulations that are suitable with the removal of the breed-specific language, you might not need to alter the ordinance after repealing the BSL. However, if the ordinance is completely lacking in effective 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 along with responsive enforcement to address problems, complaints and incidents involving animals as they arise. 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.

When owners are allowed to let dogs routinely roam or keep dogs on chains for long periods of time, 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 support for pet owners to achieve minimum animal welfare and public safety standards and identify red flag situations.

No law can prevent all dog bites, especially if no one knows what the law says. Think about how much marketing and

awareness raising is done around driver safety laws: 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 inform a community's approach to supporting pet owners rather than a way to punish them.

Learn more about effective pet-related laws in our *Humane Policy Toolkit* at [humanepro.org/policytoolkit](http://humanepro.org/policytoolkit).

## Dogs at large

Most suburban and urban communities prohibit free-roaming dogs, but at-large laws are uncommon in more rural areas. Even without specific laws, both owned and community-owned dogs are more common in underserved areas.

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 ordinance should include restraint provisions that require owners to adequately and safely confine or restrain pets both on and off their property, balancing animal welfare with public safety.

A good at-large ordinance should clearly prohibit dogs from running at large while including incremental intervention strategies for repeat offenders, with the big picture goal of keeping dogs securely in their homes. When establishing new at-large laws, support residents by planning a long education campaign so that people are aware of the new law.

It's also important to recognize that accidents happen. Sadly, one in three pets will go missing in their lifetime. Many risks from loose dogs can be reduced with prevention programs such as low- or no-cost microchipping, pet ID tags, collars and leashes, fence-building resources and containment advice.



Studies show that dogs who get loose are often found close to home. Best practices recommend prioritizing reunification directly with the owner (especially if the pet has identification) without requiring shelter intake. This not only prevents unnecessary shelter admissions but also creates an opportunity to learn what resources or support owners may need to prevent future escapes.

Policies should minimize barriers to reunification, including waiving fees when owners demonstrate they have corrected the issue that allowed the dog to get loose.

## Tethering

Constant tethering can harm both dogs and communities. Dogs are naturally social creatures who need exercise and interaction with people and/or other animals. Prolonged restraint can severely damage their physical and psychological well-being, and it increases the risk of aggression.

Importantly, tethering is a major risk factor for serious dog bites and attacks. Dogs who are tethered don't have the choice of moving away from a person or animal and may lunge or bite when they feel unsafe.

While Humane World for Animals supports efforts to prevent the continuous tethering of dogs, we recognize that people tether their dogs for a variety of reasons, including compliance with leash laws, preventing escape, as a response to behavioral challenges in the home or to comply with housing restrictions. It's important to understand these reasons so solutions can be tailored to the situation.

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. 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 limited 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's important to know that there's no one-size-fits-all tethering ordinance. The proposed legislation must be a good fit for the community given available resources and realistic prospects for enforcement.

## 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. Most states have dangerous dog laws, and some are sufficient for localities, but in some cases, localities have enacted more detailed laws.

If your state law is sufficient, it's not necessary to change your local ordinance. However, you should be able to describe your state law to local officials, who may be unaware of its provisions.

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. It's 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 shouldn't be overly harsh and should still allow dogs to be dogs (e.g., no over-muzzling or using harmful restraint). For dogs with a bite history, we recommend policies that require them to be altered, to have access to behavior support through a certified dog-training professional, and to always be appropriately supervised and safely confined.

### Spaying and neutering

Spaying or neutering a dog effectively manages their hormones in a way that reduces problem behavior. Knowing this, people sometimes assume that a law requiring people to spay or neuter their dogs would improve public safety. However, access to spay/neuter services is a complicated issue and can be limited for many pet owners who live in areas without veterinary clinics and where surgeries are expensive.

Humane World doesn't support laws that rely on punitive or compulsory measures to regulate sterilization. Punitive approaches can lead to negative financial consequences, such as fines for noncompliance due to the inability to afford veterinary care, as well as stress and emotional trauma for both animals and people when pets are separated from their families.

We advocate instead for programs and policies that focus on providing resources and support. We recommend that policymakers develop infrastructure to promote sterilization procedures by ensuring community members have access to spay/neuter services. The most effective method to increase sterilization rates is by removing the numerous barriers to veterinary care that many pet owners and caretakers face.

Nationally, about 91% of pets are sterilized, yet in underserved neighborhoods, approximately 87% of pets are unaltered. Through our Pets for Life program, Humane World has collected data that shows when people in underserved communities are provided with access to spay/neuter resources (such as cost assistance and transportation), the percentage of altered pets in the community skyrockets to 89%—nearly identical to the national rate.

This shows that most pet owners aren't opposed to altering their pets. The reason for high unaltered rates is access. (The same is true for community cat caretakers.)

### Advocate for your proposal

A key to your success will be strategically lobbying and testifying in support of your ordinance or resolution. Hopefully, you have already met with your local official, but you will need advocates to lobby other members of the council to gain their support. Be sure to use media 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 to your local paper, remembering to state your case concisely. For a sample op-ed, see page 24.

You should also use social media and encourage your coalition to do the same. As a resident, you have the right to express your opinion to your elected official, and social media is a great way for your voice to be heard.

Social media platforms have created various avenues for concerned citizens to reach their legislators directly and create meaningful discussion. When many social posts mention a specific issue, the elected official is compelled to notice (and hopefully will take action).

If your council calls a public meeting to discuss your proposal, you should attend and testify in support of your ordinance or 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, the media 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). If possible, ask an individual who enforces the current ordinance to testify at the meeting.

As much as breed discrimination is a bad thing for dogs, be sure to spend equal time focusing on the reasons that it's bad for families and communities and a waste of taxpayer dollars.

### After the vote

You may not win the first time around, but don't give up. Talk to the officials 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 ordinance passes, congratulations! This is a significant accomplishment, so be proud of all your hard work. Your community will be safer and more humane for dogs and the people who love them.



# Campaign materials

## Talking points

### Dogs should be treated as individuals, not as breed labels

- BSL penalizes all dogs based on appearance, not behavior. It's a slippery slope that harms dogs and those who love them.
- "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. Pit bull-type dogs are just dogs like any other and should be treated as individuals.

### Public sentiment

- Most Americans believe owners should decide what kind of dog they can have. Breed restrictions remove choice and penalize pet owners who love and care for their dogs.
- The better approach: Proactive, behavior-based animal management paired with education, enforcement and community support is the most effective way to reduce dog bites and keep communities safe.

## Expert consensus

- Communities nationwide are repealing breed bans and adopting breed-neutral, behavior-based laws that address aggressive behavior, regardless of breed. BSL only exists at a local level and is being repealed steadily across the country.
- Breed-specific laws are not science-based. They rely on outdated stereotypes and can result in families being forced to give up beloved pets in order to remain in their homes.
- Policymakers, scientists, veterinarians and animal welfare experts agree: BSL does not reduce dog bites or improve public safety. Effective laws hold all owners accountable, regardless of their dog's breed.

## Waste of public resources

- Breed bans waste limited taxpayer and enforcement resources without improving safety.
- They are costly, difficult to enforce, and distract from proven measures such as leash laws, confinement requirements and dangerous-dog statutes.



- Replacing BSL with behavior-based laws saves money and gives law enforcement effective tools.

### Impact on animal shelters and families

- BSL undermines trust between communities and animal welfare providers, making it harder to reach dogs and owners who need help.
- Breed restrictions drive pet relinquishment and overcrowd shelters.
- Large dogs and pit bull-type dogs have significantly longer shelter stays—often three times longer than lookalikes—due to stigma, not behavior.
- Housing and insurance restrictions increase surrenders, strain shelters, and harm families and communities.

### Rights and fairness

- Government should not dictate what kind of dog a family can own based on appearance.
- Public dollars should be used for real safety solutions, not enforcing ineffective and discriminatory policies.

### Proven ineffectiveness

- BSL is unrealistic. People will risk noncompliance rather than give up their pets, creating hidden populations of unvaccinated, unsterilized and unsocialized dogs, which makes communities less safe.

- Twenty-two states prohibit breed-specific laws, and many cities have repealed them.
- Jurisdictions consistently find breed bans are expensive, hard to enforce and ineffective at improving safety.

### Science and evidence

- Breed does not predict behavior. Supervision, training, socialization and owner responsibility do.
- Visual breed identification is unreliable; even experts get it wrong most of the time.
- Only a tiny fraction of a dog's DNA determines their physical appearance, making breed-based enforcement unscientific and unworkable.

### Responses to common rebuttals

#### **"The ban/restriction is not being enforced."**

Some localities may have breed-based bans or restrictions in their code but don't enforce them. We still want to repeal those ordinances! As long as restrictions remain on the books, they can be selectively and loosely enforced. If an ordinance isn't being enforced, that's all the more reason to update the code 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 American Veterinary Medical Association, the National Animal Care and Control Association, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention oppose BSL, along with leading animal welfare organizations.

#### **"BSL helps to curb the overbreeding of certain types of dogs."**

Breeds don't magically disappear. Improving access to spay/neuter services reduces animal populations over time. BSL can cause families to hide their dogs for fear of separation, limiting their ability to access spay/neuter services, which can lead to more dogs, not fewer.

### Testimony

Hello, my name is [name], and I'm a resident of [town]. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I support reasonable regulations for dogs and responsible ownership, including provisions for addressing dogs who have shown themselves to be dangerous. However, regulating dog ownership by breed does not accomplish that goal but moves [town] further away from effective public safety solutions.

Effective dog management has nothing to do with breed.

The most successful animal management strategies focus on enforcing basic, breed-neutral laws consistently. These laws, such as leash, restraint and humane confinement requirements, establish clear expectations for all dog owners and create safer communities.

Consistent enforcement also allows animal care and control agencies to engage with the community in a positive way by providing support, education and intervention for the vast majority of pet owners who care for their animals responsibly. It also helps identify and address problem situations early before they escalate into serious incidents.

Breed-specific policies are not supported by science. Major experts, including the American Veterinary Medical Association and the National Animal Care and Control Association, agree that breed does not predict dangerous behavior. Factors such as supervision, training, socialization and responsible ownership are what truly matter.

Breed bans are also difficult and expensive to enforce, and many jurisdictions have moved away from them. In fact, 22 states now prohibit breed-specific laws, recognizing that they are

ineffective at improving public safety.

Singling out families based on the appearance of their dog is not a fair or effective strategy. It also wastes precious shelter space and resources on dogs who already have loving homes and have done nothing wrong. Instead, we should focus on policies that promote responsible ownership and provide access to resources and services that support pet owners.

Animal care and control directors from cities and counties 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 haven't violated any laws, and how much they regret having these ordinances in place. If breed remains the focus in [town], real, effective strategies for preventing dog bites will continue to be ignored.

Managing dog behavior and protecting public safety are serious responsibilities for our community officials. I urge [the governing body] to repeal the breed-specific language in [town's] code and adopt evidence-based, breed-neutral policies that truly improve safety for both people and animals.

Thank you for your time.



THIS SPREAD, FROM LEFT: STACEY VOLODIN/HUMANE WORLD FOR ANIMALS; KEVIN WOLF/AP IMAGES FOR HUMANE WORLD FOR ANIMALS

## Sample op-ed

### Why breed-specific dog laws don't make communities safer

Everyone wants to live in a safe community. Preventing dog bites and other harmful incidents is a shared goal, and one that deserves serious, evidence-based solutions.

Breed-specific legislation (BSL) is not one of them, and I urge the [governing body] to repeal the BSL in our [city/county] code. Extensive peer-reviewed research shows that BSL does not reduce dog bite injuries. These laws are built on a factually wrong assumption that a dog's breed is predictive of whether the dog will be dangerous. In reality, it isn't breed but behavior that determines risk.

By focusing on appearance instead of conduct, BSL misdirects public resources away from strategies proven to improve safety, such as enforcing leash laws, holding owners accountable and educating the public about safe interactions with dogs.

BSL is also costly, impractical and difficult to enforce. Most breed bans rely on visual identification, which means asking animal care and control officers, police, landlords or neighbors to decide whether a dog fits an arbitrary physical description. Even animal experts struggle with this task.

Studies show that veterinarians, shelter staff and other professionals frequently misidentify dogs' breeds, especially since so many dogs are a mix of breeds. When enforcement hinges on subjective judgments about appearance, the result is confusion, inconsistency and conflict.

That confusion often escalates into costly legal disputes. Communities with BSL routinely face lawsuits between families, local governments and enforcement agencies over whether a dog "looks like" a banned breed. These cases drain taxpayer dollars while doing nothing to prevent harm.

*[If relevant to your situation, we recommend including something about how BSL is often a reactionary measure and citing the source of an article and date of story.]*

Breed-specific laws are often adopted reactively, following a serious bite incident. But reaction is not the same as prevention. No state or local jurisdiction has ever demonstrated that BSL improves public safety or significantly reduces dog bite rates. Nor has any community successfully "legislated away" a breed. Experts in public policy and animal behavior consistently recommend against breed-based or single-factor approaches to dog management.

*[If equity is a compelling argument in your locality, consider highlighting how breed-specific legislation disproportionately harms marginalized communities.]*

BSL also harms families and deepens inequities. Research shows that breed restrictions and pet bans disproportionately impact marginalized communities, particularly renters and people of color. These biases are then carried into enforcement, reinforcing existing disparities and forcing families to choose between housing stability and keeping a beloved pet.

The ripple effects reach local shelters as well. Dogs targeted by breed bans spend significantly longer in shelters, straining limited resources and reducing adoption opportunities. The stigma created by BSL increases unnecessary relinquishment, overcrowding and euthanasia.

The truth is, no law can eliminate dog bites entirely. But communities can meaningfully reduce risk by addressing the real drivers of harm, including lack of supervision, inadequate training and socialization, barriers to veterinary care and limited access to resources.

An estimated 19-20 million pets in the United States live in poverty with owners who love them but need affordable services, information and support. Focusing on expanding access to spay/neuter services, vaccinations, training and education, especially in underserved neighborhoods, is far more likely to create safer communities than regulating dogs based on how they look.

Community management of dogs has nothing to do with breed. 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 and more humane future.

# Additional resources

## Statements against BSL

### American Bar Association

[icma.org/sites/default/files/306585\\_ABA%20Due%20Process%20Adopted%20Aug%206%202012.doc](http://icma.org/sites/default/files/306585_ABA%20Due%20Process%20Adopted%20Aug%206%202012.doc)

### American Kennel Club

[cdn.akc.org/Government\\_Relations/Dangerous\\_Dogs\\_2016.pdf](http://cdn.akc.org/Government_Relations/Dangerous_Dogs_2016.pdf)

### American Veterinary Medical Association

[avma.org/resources-tools/pet-owners/dog-bite-prevention/why-breed-specific-legislation-not-answer](http://avma.org/resources-tools/pet-owners/dog-bite-prevention/why-breed-specific-legislation-not-answer)

### American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior

[avsab.org/resources/position-statements](http://avsab.org/resources/position-statements)

### National Animal Care and Control Association

[nacanet.org/naca-statement-on-breed-specific-legislation](http://nacanet.org/naca-statement-on-breed-specific-legislation)

### National Black Caucus of State Legislators

[nbcsl.org/public-policy/resolution/cyf-22-23](http://nbcsl.org/public-policy/resolution/cyf-22-23)

### National Canine Research Council

[nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/breedspecificlegislation](http://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/breedspecificlegislation)

### Obama Administration

[petitions.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/petition/ban-and-outlaw-breed-specific-legislation-bsl-united-states-america-federal-level-0/](http://petitions.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/petition/ban-and-outlaw-breed-specific-legislation-bsl-united-states-america-federal-level-0/)

### U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

[animallaw.info/sites/default/files/FHEO\\_notice\\_assistance\\_animals2013.pdf](http://animallaw.info/sites/default/files/FHEO_notice_assistance_animals2013.pdf)

### U.S. Department of Justice

[ada.gov/law-and-regs/regulations/title-ii-2010-regulations](http://ada.gov/law-and-regs/regulations/title-ii-2010-regulations)

## Humane World for Animals resources

### Breed-specific legislation

[humanepro.org/topics/bsl](http://humanepro.org/topics/bsl)

### How breed bans hurt pets and people

[humaneworld.org/en/resources/how-breed-bans-hurt-pets-and-people](http://humaneworld.org/en/resources/how-breed-bans-hurt-pets-and-people)

### Humane Policy Toolkit

[humanepro.org/policytoolkit](http://humanepro.org/policytoolkit)

### Pets for Life

[humanepro.org/pets-for-life](http://humanepro.org/pets-for-life)

### Pets Are Welcome guide to advocacy

[humanepro.org/pawadvocateguide](http://humanepro.org/pawadvocateguide)

### Tethering

[humaneworld.org/en/resources/it-okay-chain-or-tether-dogs](http://humaneworld.org/en/resources/it-okay-chain-or-tether-dogs)

## Other resources

### American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

[aspca.org/animal-cruelty/dog-fighting/what-breed-specific-legislation](http://aspca.org/animal-cruelty/dog-fighting/what-breed-specific-legislation)

### Best Friends Animal Society

[bestfriends.org/our-work/pit-bull-terrier-initiatives](http://bestfriends.org/our-work/pit-bull-terrier-initiatives)

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# Our mission

Together, we tackle the root causes  
of animal cruelty and suffering to  
create permanent change.



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