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By: [Laura Goldman](#)

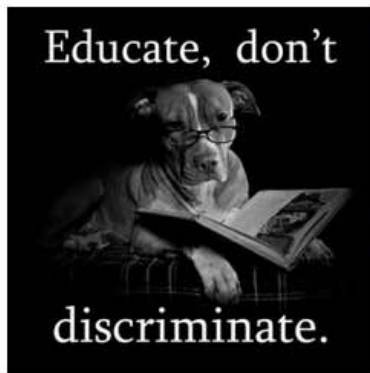
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Muzzling Breed-Specific Legislation



Do laws that pertain only to certain dog breeds have any actual affect on public safety?

Italy used to ban dozens of dog breeds, including [Collies](#) and [Corgis](#). But a new law passed in April recognizes that any dog, regardless of breed, can be dangerous. It puts the legal responsibility for the dog's behavior on the owner.

Last year the Netherlands repealed its nationwide [Pit Bull ban](#) because there

was no reduction in dog bites during the 15 years the ban was in effect. A new measure is being introduced in which dogs are judged by their behavior, not their breed.

Bye-Bye to Breed-Specific Laws

A growing number of countries and municipalities are following suit. In the United States, several cities in Kansas, Illinois and Maryland have abolished breed-specific laws because they have not proven to be effective. Denver, Colorado – whose 20-year Pit Bull ban is considered the country's toughest – is contemplating an [ordinance](#) that would repeal it.

Breed-Specific Legislation (BSL), also called Breed-Discriminatory Legislation (BDL), refers to laws or ordinances pertaining to specific breeds of domesticated animals, but it usually applies to dogs – specifically, [Pit Bulls](#) or [dogs who look like pit bulls](#). (In the 1970s, [German Shepherds](#) were usually the target; in the 1980s, it was [Rottweilers](#).)

BSL essentially removes responsibility from the dog's owner and puts it on the dog's breed.

All Major Animal Organizations Oppose BSL

Breed-specific legislation is opposed by all major animal organizations, including the [American Kennel Club](#), [United Kennel Club](#) and [American Veterinary Medical Association](#). They say how a dog is treated has more effect on its behavior than its breed, and support ordinances that address what they regard as the true cause of dangerous dog problems: irresponsible owners.

Many opponents feel the money spent on enforcing BSL (Denver alone spends more than \$800,000 annually) would be better used to educate people about responsible dog ownership. They recommend that all dog owners should take obedience training with their pets – regardless of the breed – and start socializing them with people and animals at a young age.

The Best Friends Animal Society compares the breedism inherent in BSL to human prejudice, saying it is based on "fear, misinformation, stereotyping and ignorance." American Humane Association President Marie Belew Wheatley wrote in the [Denver Post](#), "No breed automatically poses a high risk of attack, and it is unjust to punish loving, responsible dog owners merely because of a breed's reputation."

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Why Do People Support BSL?

Supporters of BSL argue that pit bulls are primarily responsible for most fatal attacks and should therefore be banned. But according to the [Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association](#), more than 30 different dog breeds have been responsible for fatal attacks on people since 1975. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [study](#) on dog breeds involved in fatal human attacks in the U.S. from 1979-1998 concluded that “other breeds may bite and cause fatalities at higher rates. Because of difficulties inherent in determining a dog’s breed with certainty, enforcement of breed-specific ordinances raises constitutional and practical issues.”

Denver city council members who support BSL consider the legislation successful because there have been no fatal pit bull maulings in the city since it was enacted. It is noteworthy, however, that in the past 20 years no fatal pit bull maulings have occurred in other Colorado cities that do not have a breed ban. Despite its pit bull ban, Denver also has a higher rate of dog-related injury hospitalizations than other Colorado cities, according to the [National Canine Research Council](#).

Although BSL has proven to be ineffective, it is still alive and well. A new Marine Corps [proposal](#) calls for the banning of all pit bulls and other “aggressive breeds” from its bases. This is sadly ironic since the most decorated dog war hero in U.S. history was a bull terrier named [Stubby](#).

How You Can Help End BSL

If BSL is being considered or is already in effect where you live, you can help to stop it by writing your legislators, attending city council meetings, and joining or starting an anti-BSL group.

For more information and ideas, visit the following websites:

- ✿ [Defending Dog](#)
- ✿ [Understand-A-Bull](#)
- ✿ [BADRAP](#)
- ✿ [Even Chance](#)

Have you been affected by breed-specific legislation? Why do you oppose or support it? Please leave a comment sharing your thoughts.

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Laura Goldman

Laura Goldman is senior social media writer for i Love Dogs, Inc. She does love dogs. And elephants and turtles. Along with writing about the loves of her life, Laura likes to play with her two pound pups and tell anyone who'll listen just how awesome Pit Bulls are.

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