

## Think breed restrictions make communities safer? Think again.

Some people perceive that certain breeds are more likely to be aggressive and cause injury. Citing public safety, they call for breed specific legislation (BSL) where certain breeds are muzzled, restricted, or banned. Although these measures were widely implemented in the late 80s and 90s, they are being reversed throughout the world, because they have been shown to be ineffective, expensive, and inhumane.



### There is no conclusive way to determine a dog's breed.

Unless you have access to a dog's pedigree, you are relying on visual clues like body shape and coat to identify a breed. Studies show that even trained professionals (e.g., vets and shelter workers) are wrong more than half the time!

Take a look through the photos along the right side of this document. Try to identify which were identified by shelter professionals as pit bulls or pit bull mixes – answer is at the end.

### BSL is expensive.

BSL leads to higher costs to cities and taxpayers. More animal control resources are required to investigate reports of "pit bulls" – policing their visual appearance rather than answering calls about actual risks or behaviour complaints.

Disputes about labelling tie up resources and may ultimately end up in court. Discrimination, restrictions, and higher fees may mean that a city may actually see more of these dogs in their sheltering system for a longer amount of time. If a dog is found at large the owner may be less inclined to claim him. It can also be more difficult for owners to find housing or other resources, resulting in more surrendered dogs, and fewer opportunities to adopt them out when the legislation is stacked against them.



In Ontario, the bill has been consistently in court, with the first lawsuit filed the very day it was enacted: August 29, 2005. There are lawsuits from individual owners whose dogs have been seized – resulting in damages paid out and thousands of dollars in impound fees while the dog's fate is determined. After one such case, Councillor Carolyn Parrish commented, "We've learned from this that this law is very difficult to enforce and it breaks people's hearts. Saying that something looks like something else is a very poor basis for a law." The city of Ottawa has given up altogether on trying to enforce the ban because of cost and logistics.

By contrast, the City of Calgary targets known risk factors and owner behaviour without any breed restrictions – and has made a **profit** from increased fines and policing of licensing fees. Proceeds from licensing and fines have paid for a dedicated Animal Control truck fleet with a networked computer system, expanded shelter facility, and public education and subsidy programs.

**There are factors that make dogs more likely to bite. Breed isn't one of them.**

There is no conclusive data showing that specific breeds bite more, or do more damage when they attack.

In 2012, the American Veterinary Medical Association analyzed three dozen studies on the topic of breed and bite that had been published over the last 40 years. These studies variously identified German Shepherds, pit bulls, Rottweilers, Jack Russell Terriers, Chows or other breeds/mixes with the highest bite rates. The AVMA concluded that severity of injury was linked to dog's size, temperament, owner's management, and proper supervision of children. It did not support the targeting of breed, and noted that if breed-specific legislation was based on data, a significant group of large breeds, including herding and guardian breeds, would need to be targeted.

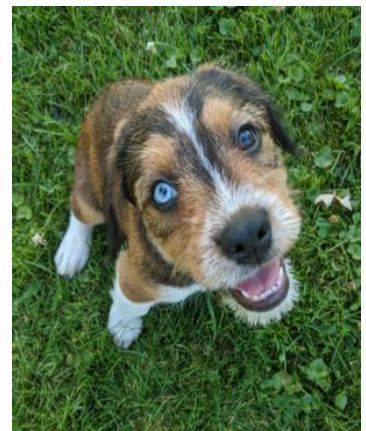
In Canada, there have been 46 fatalities due to dog attacks since 1983. Five have been labelled as "pit bull" breeds. The vast majority are northern breeds (huskies and Malamutes).

While some articles circulate the internet with staggering claims about injury and death due to pit bull bites, they don't stand up to scrutiny. Most are based on anecdotal or media reports, which are not a reliable source of data. A December 2013 study in the American Veterinary Medical Association examined the issue of media breed reporting by comparing animal control reports, breeding background, DNA reports, and examination by veterinary professionals. A reliable breed descriptor was determined in only 18% of fatal dog attacks. It was found that at least 40% of the time, media reports did not agree with other sources, and the media had a habit of reporting mixed breeds as single breeds.

The data shows unequivocally that there are identifiable, interacting causes that contribute to dog aggression. Numerous studies in the American and Canadian Veterinary Journals, among others, correlate dog bites to factors like:

- sexually intact status (not spayed/neutered)
- poor breeding
- lack of early socialization
- poor health
- dogs roaming loose, especially in packs
- dogs are not family dogs (lived outside or was chained)
- victim's age and behaviour (most dog bites are to children)
- abuse or neglect

BSL addresses none of these factors. Some argue that it keeps powerful dogs out of the hands of poor owners, but it does nothing to prevent that individual from getting another dog – whether another restricted breed or another "power" breed that is easier to obtain. Only responsible ownership legislation can address the biggest risk factor at all – the human end of the leash.



## **The bottom line? BSL doesn't work.**

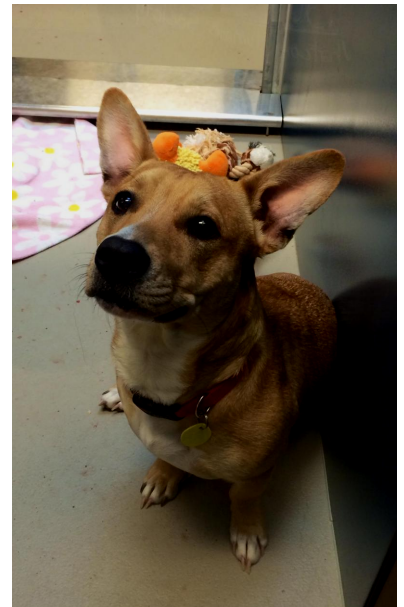
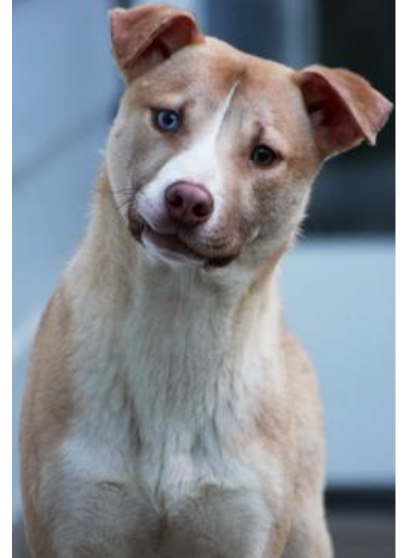
In places as diverse as the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, the UK and the United States, dog bites have continued and sometimes even increased under BSL.

This is true in Canada as well. In February 2013, the Canadian Veterinary Journal published a study comparing bite rates in Canadian municipalities. Cities with breed specific legislation did not have lower bite rates. Factors that contributed to safer dog/human relations included public education, active animal control enforcement, and increased animal control resources.

As governments begin to recognize the flawed logic and poor track record of BSL, more and more jurisdictions are adopting breed-neutral legislation. Some places are outlawing breed discrimination itself! A total of 23 American states have legislation that forbids breed discrimination within their municipalities.

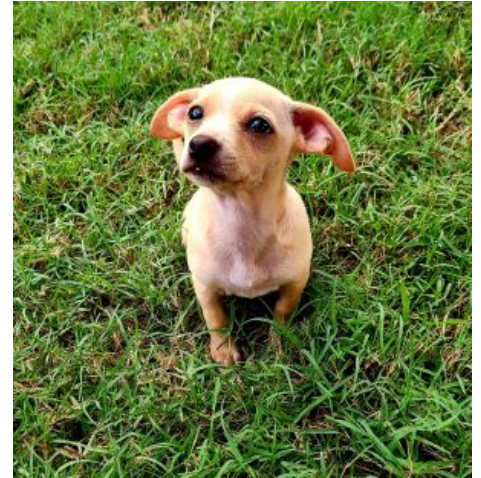
The following Canadian municipalities have removed breed-specific language from their municipal bylaws in recent years:

- **2005** - BSL reversed in Vancouver, BC
- **2009** - BSL reversed in North Vancouver, BC
- **2010** - BSL reversed in Delta, rejected in Port Coquitlam, BC
- **2011** - BSL reversed in Castlegar, Cumberland, Coquitlam, and White Rock, BC
- **2012** - BSL rejected in Maple Ridge, BC
- **2012** - BSL reversed in Edmonton, AB
- **2013** - BSL reversed in Pitt Meadows and New Westminster, BC
- **2015** - BSL reversed in Chestermere and Redcliff, AB
- **2016** - BSL reversed in McLennan, AB
- **2017** - BSL reversed in Prince George, Revelstoke, North Cowichan, BC
- **2017** - BSL reversed in Grande Prairie County, AB
- **2017** - BSL reversed in Montreal, QC
- **2018** - BSL reversed in St. Paul County, AB
- **2019** - BSL reversed in Chemainus, BC
- **2019** - BSL reversed in Magrath and Kitscoty, Mountain View County and Vermillion River County, AB
- **2020** - BSL reversed in Picture Butte, AB



## What do the experts say?

Organizations like the Canadian and American Kennel Clubs, the BC and Canadian Veterinary Associations, Humane Societies, and the SPCA do not support BSL. Even organizations that do not have an animal-related mandate have spoken out against BSL as a legal and public health mistake, including the American Bar Association and the Centers for Disease Control.



## What does work?

Promoting responsible ownership and targeting behaviour – not breed – is the only proven way to reduce dog bites and make communities safer. This was pioneered as “Dangerous Dog Legislation” in the City of Calgary in the 1980s, where they were able to decrease their bite rate by 75%, bringing it to the lowest in North America at one point.

All major public health and animal welfare groups support **Responsible Owner Legislation**, with proven measures to increase public safety including

- Mandatory leashing of dogs in public or shared areas
- Spay and neuter incentives
- Laws against tethering, chaining, or unreasonable restraint of dogs
- Clear and specific bylaws with associated penalties
- Active ticketing and enforcement, with visible Animal Services presence in the community
- Public education and encouraging community members to report bad owner behaviour.



## Who is breed neutral?

Most cities in Canada (outside of Ontario where there is a province-wide breed ban) are breed neutral. This includes major population centres like:

- Abbotsford
- Brandon
- Calgary
- Charlottetown
- Edmonton
- Fort McMurray
- Fredericton
- Montreal
- Prince Albert
- Prince George
- Regina
- Saint John
- Saskatoon
- Surrey
- Vancouver
- Victoria

## What is a “pit bull”?

A “pit bull” is not a breed, but rather a general term to describe a dog with a blocky head and short coat. There are documented cases of Labradors, Boxers, Mastiffs, American Bulldogs, Rottweilers, and other breeds/mixes being initially identified as “pit bulls” in the media or elsewhere.

Three breeds are generally defined as “pit bulls” under bylaws: the American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, and Staffordshire Bull Terrier. Purebred versions of these dogs are relatively rare in Canada. Most dogs targeted under the legislation are mixed breed dogs and are being penalized due to their physical appearance and not their behaviour, or risk to the public.

## What is the way forward?

With so many years of failed legislation behind us, the world is beginning to recognize the obvious – BSL doesn’t work. Banning or stigmatizing the breed hurts everyone, and punishes responsible owners. For more information on pit bull type dogs and better animal control options, visit these sites:

[justice-for-bullies.myshopify.com](http://justice-for-bullies.myshopify.com)  
[nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com](http://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com)  
[animalfarmfoundation.org](http://animalfarmfoundation.org)



The BC SPCA has a sample bylaw kit available to municipalities upon request:

<https://spca.bc.ca/programs-services/working-for-better-laws/model-municipal-bylaws>



*Photos – all of the dogs pictured on these pages were listed on Petfinder as pit bulls or pit bull mixes.*