UKC Position on Breed Specific Legislation

United Kennel Club believes that breed specific legislation is a poor choice for communities interested in protecting citizens from dog bites and attacks. Breed specific legislation, or BSL, is the singling out of a breed or breeds of dogs to take varying degrees of enforcement action against, in a weak attempt to reduce the numbers of dog attacks. The majority of BSL is directed at American Pit Bull Terriers, proudly among our top 5 breeds, but other breeds such as Rottweilers and Akitas are targeted as well.

Realistically, the number of dog bites nationwide has been fairly consistent over the last century, and there has not been any meaningful increase. Attempting to attribute bites to a single breed and labeling that breed is fruitless, as there exists no real, factual data to show that any one breed is more responsible for bites and attacks than others. Singling out a breed to attach blame does not work to decrease dog attacks. Case in point, the Dutch government lifted a 15 year ban on 'pit bulls' because there has not been ANY decrease in dog bites. There are many other factors at play behind dog attacks, such as the purpose the dog is used for, owner management and maintenance, neglect or cruelty factors, and other variables such as sex, age, socialization, etc., that are not breed related.

Not only is BSL ineffective, it also increases costs to cities and communities to enforce these laws and defend the laws against challenges in court. Some cities have overturned long standing bans due to a dramatic increase in enforcement costs and an influx to animal control; the economic impact was far too great. BSL is also extremely difficult to enforce. Many laws and ordinances either do not correctly identify what breeds are included, or are overly vague. Often these laws include mixes of the listed breeds as well. There currently exists no legally accepted scientific method to positively identify breeds or mixes, and many breeds look very similar, especially to the general public. While even professionals have difficulty in identifying what a mix may be comprised of, inexperienced law enforcement officials with no dog background are expected to identify mixtures, and end up with arbitrary and often incorrect identifications.

BSL results in punishing and ultimately driving away responsible owners of the targeted breed(s) while having little to no impact on the actual cause of problems, those using dogs for illegal or immoral purposes. Instead of enacting BSL, communities should be more aggressive in enforcement of dangerous dog, anti-fighting, and anti-cruelty statutes. More emphasis must be placed on owner responsibility, as the majority of attacks are due to owner neglect or mistreatment. Targeting the actions and non-action of owners will be more effective and sensible in realistically decreasing dog attacks.