



UKC Position on Use of Breed Standards in 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, but other breeds such as Rottweilers and Akitas are targeted as well. As BSL has developed across the country, more legislation has expanded to include the use of breed standards to identify dogs as “pit bulls” for the purpose of enforcing the law.

The concept of a “pure breed” of dogs is an artificial construct that human beings have created to define a subset of the species of the domestic dog (*canis lupus familiaris*). In order to define the concept of a pure breed, written standards are developed describing the appearance and temperament of the individual dog subset. The breed standard is a detailed description of the perfect and ideal specimen of that breed, the breed already having been identified and known.

Breed standards are designed to be used by three groups of people and each of those three groups utilize the standard for a specific purpose. The first use is to assist dog breeders by defining the perfect example of the breed in question, and what breeders should be striving to breed towards. Dog breeders work within a pool of dogs that are already identified and registered as purebred dogs. They use the standard as a template for evaluating the dogs in their breeding programs.

The second group of people utilizing the breed standard consists of dog show judges. These judges use the breed standard to evaluate dogs in competition. Again, these people are working with dogs already identified by registration as purebred representatives of their individual breeds. Using the written standard, dog show judges offer expert and unbiased opinions to breeders as to the quality of the dogs by choosing as winners the dog that best fits the standard.

Finally, the breed standard allows prospective puppy buyers, when selecting from samples of puppies known to be pure bred dogs, to anticipate the size, grooming requirements and temperaments of the different pure breeds of dogs.

As you can see, then, the breed standard was not, and is not, designed to be used to identify a pure bred dog in a group of dogs of otherwise unknown background. The reasons for this are simple. First, the differences between two breeds of purebred dogs are often so subtle that a poor representative of one breed may easily be mistaken for a poor representative of another similar breed. For example, we suggest you compare photos of Irish Wolfhounds with Scottish Deerhounds; Lakeland Terriers with Welsh Terriers; or Great Pyrenees with Kuvaszok. Secondly, because dogs have so many genes and are so genetically variable, it is possible for mixed-bred dogs to look very much like their purebred relatives. It is also possible for a mixed breed dog to look very much like a breed that is not one of the breeds that the particular mixed-breed is comprised of. For example, some Boxer mixes may appear to some as American Pit Bull Terrier when the dog carries no APBT blood whatsoever.

United Kennel Club believes that breed specific legislation is highly ineffective in decreasing dog bites. 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 for all dogs regardless of their origins or breed. 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.