BREED SPECIFIC LEGISLATION

Breed Specific Legislation (BSL) is a statute or regulation that targets a specific breed or breeds of dogs that the local government thinks are dangerous. BSL labels a dog as "dangerous" based upon its breed alone and not based on behavior exhibited by individual dogs. The most common breeds targeted in BSL are the American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier and Staffordshire Bull Terrier (or "pit bulls"). However, it has been expanded in some areas to include Rottweilers, German Shepherds, Chow Chows and Doberman Pinchers. These laws make it illegal to own the breeds specified in the regulation. Once BSL is enacted, your dog can be removed from your home because ownership of that dog is now illegal. It does not take into account therapy dogs, service dogs or police dogs. If they are on the breed ban list, they are subject to the same treatment. Any dog that is on the list will also be euthanized upon arrival at the shelter. The reasoning behind Breed Specific Legislation is to stop dog attacks. Unfortunately, this doesn't work for several reasons.

Breed bans don't educate or address irresponsible owners
Behind every aggressive dog is an irresponsible owner. This is a people problem, not a dog problem. Breed Specific Legislation is a quick fix that only punishes the dog without educating owners on the importance of spaying/neutering, socialization, and training for any dog breed. Banning a breed will not stop people from getting that breed of dog, but it will force them to buy their dogs from irresponsible sources. If someone is breeding a dog illegally, they're also unlikely to be screening the dogs for proper temperament. Because these people are breaking the law, they're unable to attend training classes or properly socialize their dog to sights, sounds and people within the community. This makes it far more likely the dog will one day bite out of fear. It also prohibits owners from seeking proper medical care for their dog, or getting them neutered. Responsible, law abiding citizens who have well socialized dogs are forced to give up their family member even if they've never once acted aggressively. Meanwhile, criminals and those with little regard for the law rarely abide by breed bans. In fact, banning certain breeds often makes them even more desirable. It takes dogs out of the hands of responsible people whose dogs don't bite and put them into the hands of people whose dogs do bite.

Breed Specific Legislation is hard to enforce
Breed identification requires expert knowledge, which police officers and animal control officers both lack. American Pit Bull Terriers are often confused with at least 20 other breeds. Can you spot the American Pit Bull Terrier? [http://www.pitbullsontheweb.com/petbull/findpit.html](http://www.pitbullsontheweb.com/petbull/findpit.html). A perfect example of misidentification happened June 5, 2008 in an attack on a child in Pacoima. The Los Angeles Times ran with the headline "2 Year Old Stable After Pit Bull Bites His Face." Breed identification was made by an LAPD officer with no more experience in breed identification than the average person. A few days later, the LA Times ran this retraction: "An article in Thursday's California section about a boy attacked by his family's dog quoted authorities as saying the dog was a pit bull. The Los Angeles Department of Animal Services
said Friday that the animal that bit the toddler was a shepherd mix."  Shepherd’s look very different from pit bulls.  How do you effectively enforce a pit bull ban if your own police department can't accurately identify the breed of dog?  In Denver, pit bulls are determined by physical appearance alone.  Even though DNA testing with blood samples has now made it possible to conclusively determine which breeds are in a mix, their legislation does not recognize the blood tests.  Countless dogs with square-shaped heads get falsely singled out as pit bull mixes simply because of their appearance and their DNA test results, which prove that they don’t have any of the three breeds considered “pit bulls”, aren’t admissible in court.  Someone’s purebred chocolate lab could be euthanized under their Breed Specific Legislation simply because their local police force can’t accurately identify what is or is not a pit bull.  Many areas have obscure wording in their regulations.  Who gets to determine what a “pit bull type dog” is?  The Center for Disease Control (CDC) stopped keeping records of dog attacks by breed ten years ago because they found that breed identification was unreliable.  They were gathering their reports from newspaper and media reports such as the one listed above.  Since the original headline stated pit bull and the retraction was days later without a headline, this attack would have gone on record as the wrong breed.  After analyzing data, the CDC realized that their reports were inaccurate and their record keeping stopped at that point.

**No data to suggest they work**  
The UK and Scotland have conducted studies of the results of their breed bans.  UK has seen an increase in dog bites of 50% since it enacted Breed Specific Legislation.  Scotland has an increase of 160%.  This indicates we have a people problem, not a dog problem.  There is an irresponsible owner behind every aggressive dog.  Breed bans do not tackle the people issue.  They punish the dog instead.  The Dutch government realized this and repealed its ban on the breed in 2008 after 15 years because their dog bite statistics did not go down.  The RSPCA in England is recommending that the UK also drop its BSL in favor of laws that hold owners accountable.  Denver, Colorado has one of the most talked about breed bans.  According to statistics provided by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Denver has had 273 dog related hospitalizations between 1995 and 2006 despite their breed ban.  That doesn't sound like the city has been made safer by their Pit Bull Ban.  In fact, according to the Colorado Association of Animal Control, Labrador Retrievers are the breed with the highest bite incident in that state yet Labs aren’t banned in Denver.

Identifying one breed over another as more "dangerous" is meaningless.  The breed of dog responsible for the most serious bites and attacks often changes from year to year, frequently in proportion to how popular the breed is overall.  Accurate information on dog bites and the

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3. [http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2008/06/09/international/i100455D22.DTL](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2008/06/09/international/i100455D22.DTL)  
proportion of bites to breeds is difficult to determine at best. Accurate statistics would require comprehensive reports of all bites, reliable breed identification, and detailed information about the demographics of the entire dog population of the area in question. This number is often unreliable since compliance with local dog licensing or registration requirements is usually below 20% in most U.S. communities.

**A more effective solution**

Breed Specific Legislation should be replaced with behavior-based regulations and sanctions. If communities wish to effectively control the potential for canine aggression and encourage owner responsibility, the focus should be on individual dogs’ history of behavior. Legislators should be implementing and enforcing non-breed specific dangerous dog laws. These laws deem a dog dangerous based on individual dangerous or vicious acts regardless of the dog’s breed. Existing laws need to be strictly enforced and irresponsible owners need to be held accountable for the actions of their dogs. Breed Specific Legislation removes all responsibility from the dog’s owner and places it solely on the dog. It allows a well-trained, child-friendly pit bull to be euthanized while ignoring a Labrador that has bitten 3 people. A behavior-based law will effectively target dogs with a history of aggression regardless of what they look like. It will also encourage owners to address the aggressive behavior early or they risk having their dog euthanized. Calgary is leading the way by enacting and then enforcing stiffer penalties on dog owners without targeting a particular breed. They are finding this works well as their attacks have fallen to the lowest level in 25 years despite pit bulls being a favored dog in that region.\(^5\) Removing all "pit bulls" from a community does not instantly render it safe. Instead, it instills a false sense of security among residents because the truly dangerous dogs remain in the community since those dogs do not meet the criteria of the banned breed.

For more information on what experts like the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and National Centers for Disease Control think about Breed Specific Legislation, read here:
http://www.animalfarmfoundation.org/topic.php?id=21&topic=17

For accurate, documented, reliable research on dog bites and attacks, please visit the National Canine Research Council here:
http://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/

Remember, that all breeds bite. Be a responsible dog owner. Spay/neuter your pet, socialize and train them. http://www.understand-a-bull.com/Articles/OtherBreedBites/AllDogsBite.htm

\(^5\) http://www.calgaryherald.com/Life/Calgary+attacks+fall+lowest+level+years/1313555/story.html