

WHAT IS A “PIT BULL”? THE FACTS VS THE MYTHS

The following research will examine the most commonly discussed facts vs. myths of dogs known as “pit bulls”. Click on the hyperlinks to read more about the science and facts behind each statement.

THE FACTS VS. THE MYTHS ABOUT “PIT BULLS”

FACT: [THERE IS NO SUCH BREED OF DOG CALLED “PIT BULL”](#)

- The term “pit bull” describes virtually any dog with short hair, a blocky head, and a muscular build. The term includes 28 breeds of dogs who are often incorrectly labeled “pit bull” and includes countless mixes of those 28 breeds.
- The pure breeds included in the family of dogs generally referred to as “pit bulls” are:
 - The American Staffordshire Terrier,
 - The Staffordshire Bull Terrier, and
 - The American Pit Bull Terrier (which is the only accurate use of the term).

MYTH: [A “PIT BULL” HAS A JAW PRESSURE EQUIVALENT TO THAT OF A SHARK](#)

- Measuring by the Pounds Per Square Inch (PSI) jaw strength testing, the following statistics have been identified:

◦ A Bull Shark:	1250 PSI
◦ A Great White Shark:	669 PSI
◦ The Staffordshire Bull Terrier:	328 PSI
◦ The American Staffordshire Terrier:	235 PSI
◦ The American Pit Bull Terrier:	235 PSI

MYTH: [“PIT BULL” TYPE DOGS HAVE LOCKING JAWS](#)

- It has been scientifically proven that the jaw of a “pit bull” type dog does not have any locking mechanism in their skulls. This is the case for all dogs, not just “pit bulls”.

MYTH: [“PIT BULL” TYPE DOGS HAVE AGGRESSIVE GENES; I.E. AGGRESSION IS “BRED INTO THEM”](#)

- This has been scientifically proven as inaccurate as there is no gene that determines aggression levels.
- Temperament testing proves that the three pure breeds that make up the “pit bull” family of dogs consistently rank in the top 5 of good temperaments of all dog breeds tested.
- All breeds of dogs have 98% of the same DNA and genetic make up.

FACT: [ALL DOGS HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO BITE](#)

- There is no breed or type of dog more “prone” to biting more than any other breed or type.
- Dogs behavior is shaped by the owner and their environment.
- Dog owners should be held accountable for the behavior of their animals and practice responsible pet ownership.

FACT: "PIT BULL" TYPE DOGS ARE OVER-REPRESENTED IN MEDIA REPORTING

- "Pit Bull" type dogs are reported on by media often without accurate fact finding.
- Dogs without lineage to an accurate breed in the "pit bull" family of dogs are often typed as such when there is a negative incident involved.
- Incidents involving alleged "pit bull" type dogs are reported on average 200 times. Incidents involving any other type of dog are reported on once, if at all.

MYTH: "PIT BULL" TYPE DOGS WHO HAVE BEEN TRAINED TO FIGHT ARE LOST CAUSES

- Dogs typed as "pit bull" have been rescued from excruciation circumstances, such as dog fighting and extreme neglect/abuse, and have been rehabilitated at a success rate of 95%.
- Less than 1% of dogs rescued from dog fighting, abuse, or neglectful cases are euthanized due to temperament. That includes all breeds of dogs, not just "pit bull" type, regardless of the amount of time they have been subjected to the abusive behavior.

FACT: LAW ENFORCEMENT, ESPECIALLY IN THE USA, ARE USING "PIT BULL" TYPE DOGS AS K9's

- Many "pit bull" type dogs have been successfully trained as police K9 unit dogs and arson detection dogs.
- "Pit bull" type dogs are being adopted from shelters and rescue facilities and successfully repurposed for a life of public service in law enforcement.

FACT: BREED SPECIFIC LEGISLATION KILLS INNOCENT DOGS AND TARGETS RESPONSIBLE OWNERS

- BSL is a law that is both over-inclusive and under-inclusive, and has been responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of innocent dogs around the world.
- BSL is costly, difficult to enforce, and unjustly targets dogs of different breeds than the ones specifically mentioned in many types of municipal legislations.
- BSL targets responsible owners and decreases public safety. Often, well tempered dogs who are "typed" are removed from loving, responsible families, while dogs who are not "typed" continue to pose a threat to public safety.

FACT: BREED SPECIFIC LEGISLATION DRAINS MANY COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- BSL costs tens of millions of dollars each year to enforce in Ontario.
- BSL drains community resources, such as animal control and police enforcement, as the focus remains on one type or breed of dog, rather than seeking to assist in situations where public safety is in jeopardy.

MYTH: BREED SPECIFIC LEGISLATION ENHANCES PUBLIC SAFETY

- BSL causes a false sense of security to the general public – they are often of the opinion that they are safe from dangerous dogs with BSL in place to protect them.

FACT: BSL IS BEING REPEALED AROUND THE WORLD DUE TO INEFFECTIVENESS

- Since 2016, there have been more than 100 communities across North America who have repealed their breed specific law due to ineffectiveness in enhancing public safety, and extreme cost involved in enforcement.
- Progressive law makers are starting to realize that owner accountability must be at the forefront in order to maintain safer kinder communities.

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AND NOW FOR THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE FACTS...

THERE IS NO SUCH BREED OF DOG CALLED “PIT BULL”

This is a generic term, used mostly by law enforcement and media, that describes any dog with short fur, a blocky head, and a strong muscular build. 28 different pure breeds of dogs such as Boxers, Mastiffs, Dogo Argentinos, American Bullies, and American Bulldogs (commonly referred to as “bully breeds”) to name but a few are consistently and incorrectly identified as “pit bulls” by untrained officials. Because of this inaccurate visual identification, they are often lumped in with the dogs that are assumed to be a dangerous breed or “type” according to the Breed Specific Legislation (BSL) enforced in certain municipalities¹.

The generic term “pit bull” normally refers to the following breeds of dogs, as recognized by the Canadian/United Kennel Clubs:

- American Staffordshire Terrier,
- Staffordshire Bull Terriers, and
- American Pit Bull Terrier (which is the only accurate use of the term “pit bull”).

Most breed identification issues arise when law enforcement is unsure of the accurate breed of a dog involved in an incident. In these situations, if the dog(s) in question have any similar characteristics of a “pit bull” as described above, they are almost always reported as BEING a “pit bull”. Untrained law enforcement is often quick to assume the lineage of the dog without any further gathering of facts or evidence. This results in augmenting the perception that “pit bulls” are involved in negative incidents more often than other types or breeds of dogs, further damaging their reputation, and creating an unnecessary sense of fear in the unsuspecting, and sometimes misinformed, general public.ⁱ

Any time the word “pit bull” can be included in a dog related incident, it is reported on multiple times, as there is tendency to capitalize on the catch phrase. However, in cases where the term “pit bull” cannot be used, the incident is rarely reported on, if at all, regardless of the severity of the bite. On the rare occasion that an incident involving a non-bully breed looking dog is reported on, it is reported once, and the breed of the dog is rarely mentioned in the headlines, nor referred to in the report itself. This theory was tested in 2007 by the National Canine Research Council, who performed a quantitative study of dog bite reporting in a four-day period. They proved that the “pit bull” bias is more than just a theory - it’s a fact. Between August 18 and August 21, 2007, there were 4 dog bites reported in Denver:

1. a Labrador mix that attacked a 70 year old man sending him to the hospital in critical condition was reported on once,
2. a mixed breed dog attacked a 16 month old child who received fatal head and neck injuries was reported on twice,
3. a mixed breed dog attacked a six year old boy who was hospitalized after having his ear torn off and receiving a severe bite to the head was reported on once, and
4. a 59 year old woman was attacked in her own home by 2 dogs that had the characteristics of a “pit bull” type with severe, but not fatal, injuries was reported in over 230 articles internationally, as well as major television news networks including CNN, MSNBC, and Fox.ⁱⁱ

Breed specific laws are often implemented to target a certain breed or type of dog that has been deemed as “dangerous”. Unfortunately, these laws end up also targeting hundreds of mixed breed dogs that any family can adopt from their local pound who have no lineage to the “pit bull” family of dogs. This results in a large population of dogs who fit these physical characteristics, but not the accurate breed attributes, being a target of BSL, along with their responsible owners.

¹ See below for more information on BSL

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THE STRENGTH OF “PIT BULL” JAWS, AND THE MYTH OF THE LOCKING JAW

The strength of a “pit bull” type dog’s jaw is grossly exaggerated in many instances of reporting. Some people have gone so far as to state that the jaw pressure of a shark is less than that of a “pit bull” type dog. The average jaw pressure of a bull shark is on average 1250 pounds per square inch (PSI) and a great white shark is on average 669 PSI – clearly making that statement inaccurate. Cane Corso’s have the strongest jaw pressure in domestic dogs, averaging approximately 700 psi. Bull Mastiffs come in at 552 PSI, Rottweilers at 328 PSI, and German Shepherds at 238 PSI. American Pit Bull Terriers come in with an average bite of 235 PSI, which is not even in the top 10 strongest dog bites. For reference, the average human adult male has a 150 PSI bite.ⁱⁱⁱ

Further to the strength of the jaw of a “pit bull”, it has been scientifically proven that “pit bull” type dogs, as is the same with ALL dogs, do **not** have a locking jaw. While it is true that their jaws are powerful, Dr. Lehr Brisbin from the University of Georgia has confirmed: *“In the studies which have been conducted of the structure of the skulls, mandibles and teeth of “pit bull” type dogs show that, in proportion to their size, their jaw structure and thus its inferred functional morphology, is no different than that of any breed of dog. There is absolutely no evidence for the existence of any kind of ‘locking mechanism’ unique to the structure of the jaw and/or teeth of the American Pit Bull Terrier.”*

Making false statements about the strength and locking aspect of a “pit bull” jaw is another way the misled public buys into the hysteria spread by the anti “pit bull” community. Sadly, there are multiple media sources, but by no means all, that trust the false statistics of the anti “pit bull” lobby, and do not perform adequate research or fact checking before presenting this information in their articles. They truly believe that just by including the buzz word “pit bull”, their articles will be more successful, especially if there is a negative incident attached to the term. Unfortunately, they are almost always correct; people are more inclined to believe the hype surrounding dog related incidents involving a dog identified (rightly or wrongly) as a “pit bull”.

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“PIT BULLS” ARE NOT UNPREDICTABLE AND DO NOT HAVE AGGRESSION “BRED INTO THEM”

All dogs, regardless of their size or breed, have the potential of being dangerous in the hands of a negligent or abusive owner. It is unfortunate that in these situations, it is always the dog who is blamed, rather than holding the owner accountable for the behavior. Counter to this, any dog, regardless of breed, type, size, or appearance, can be an asset to the public when raised by a responsible owner in a positive environment. Dogs provide an “instant calming presence” to many, many people across the world, and naturally make people happy. Without the onus of owner accountability, well behaved dogs typed as “pit bulls” will continue to be targeted, and it will remain impossible to promise safer, kinder communities.

Something that is shocking for many is the discovery that one of the dogs responsible for the highest number of dog bites is a family favorite: the Labrador Retriever. This has **NOTHING** to do with their temperament – this has everything to do with assumptions, as I will explain. The Labrador Retriever is well known for being especially gentle with children, therefore parents will often leave a young child unsupervised. The dog, who becomes irritated by an antagonizing behavior by the child (through no malicious intent on the part of the child) communicates through a growl, or retaliates through a bite. The dog is then punished for simply trying to communicate, asking the behavior to stop. In this particular example, if a responsible adult had been supervising the situation, the incident likely could have been prevented, and even used as a learning experience for the child depending on their age.

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Regardless of breed, a dog is still a dog and requires guidance and training. It is impossible to determine the temperament of a specific dog based solely on breed or appearance. This fact needs to be fully understood by everyone: dogs are all individuals who have limits of what they will put up with before they defend themselves, or at least try to communicate with you that they are not comfortable. These dogs, regardless of their breed or type, do not deserve to lose their lives due to humans ignoring their communication attempts, nor do dogs of similar appearance deserve to be judged based on the behavior of an isolated incident.

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TEMPERAMENT TESTING OF “PIT BULL” TYPE DOGS – WHAT DO THEIR GENETICS MEAN?

“Pit bull” type dogs of today are mostly bred for work and companionship, and have been a popular family pet for many years due to their gentleness, affection, and loyalty. According to caninejournal.com, dogs typed as “pit bull” statistically rank 4th of all breeds of dogs for their consistency in passing temperament testing. Stating “pit bull” type dogs, or any dog for that matter, can have aggression bred into them is scientifically proven as impossible, as even the most aggressive dogs of any breed can produce perfectly tempered puppies. The main factor always remains a dogs social environment, their upbringing, and responsible ownership.

In temperament testing, “pit bull” type dogs are consistently amongst the leaders in excellent temperament and are some of the most tested breeds of dogs in the world. As of 2017, the temperament test results for the breeds that commonly make up the “pit bull” family are:

- American Staffordshire Terrier – 85.5%,
- American Pit Bull Terrier – 87.4%,
- Bull Terrier – 91.6%, and
- Staffordshire Bull Terrier – 90.9%.

For comparison purposes only, Chihuahuas came in at 69.6%, Miniature Poodles at 76.7%, and Golden Retrievers at 85.6%. Other dogs that have been targets of BSL in the past also rank relatively high on the temperament statistic lists (e.g. German Shepherds – 85.3%, Rottweilers - 84.7%, and Doberman Pinschers - 79.5%).^{iv}

Ninety eight percent of all dog breeds share identical DNA. Only 0.25 percent of the DNA of a dog is what constitutes its physical characteristics^v. There is no DNA, no gene, nor anything else that determines temperament, aggression levels, socialization ability, or any other personality trait of a dog^{vi}. According to Agustin Fuentes, an American primatologist and biological anthropologist at Princeton University, and formerly the chair of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Notre Dame: *“Despite popular notions that certain genes or genetic elements control or regulate the appearance and intensity of aggressive behaviors, there is no evidence for any one-to-one genetic controls, nor is there evidence for certain molecules or systems in the body that predetermine aggressive outcomes. There is no gene or system in the body that can be identified as ‘for aggression’. While it appears clear that genetic variation in neurotransmitters and hormones can be involved in the ways in which we express aggressive behavior, there is no direct or causal link. Our genes cannot make us aggressive.”*

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MEDIA REPORTING ON DOG BITES

The National Canine Research Council has done extensive research on the effects of media reports on dog bite incidents. Unfortunately, they discovered that the most common practice has been to retroactively study canine bite incidents using historical media reporting, which can sacrifice the information’s accuracy,

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reliability, and completeness. Although it is unethical to knowingly cite flawed or unproven data, certain outlets have no choice but to use this route due to lack of resources, tight and demanding deadlines, cost effectiveness, and easy accessibility to the information. Sadly, this results in documented literature lacking in facts or evidence.

Some outlets, often done with no malicious intent, continue to site sources who are proven to have no statistical or scientific data to back up their claims. These sources do, however, have what sells: graphic images of dog attacks. Their claims that the dogs involved in an incident are “pit bulls” are rarely checked for accuracy. More than 90% of the incidents they claim to be at the hands of a “pit bull” aren’t even accurate, and they have been quoted as saying *“keep it labeled as a pit bull until they can prove us wrong: by then, nobody will care”*. They’re right: usually by the time an owner can prove the innocence of their dog, it’s too late and the damage has been done. Even more disturbing is the fact that these groups shamelessly exploit the victims they claim they are defending; sickeningly, this almost always includes photographs of gruesome injuries sustained by a child.²

Veterinarians, animal behavior experts, and professional dog trainers all state that there is no scientific evidence that a “pit bull” type dog is more dangerous than any other type of dog, and that any attempts to say otherwise are simply not true. If media were to solely rely on reputable sources for information on “pit bull” type dogs, they would find that there is very little there to back up the many fallacies put in place by the anti “pit bull” lobbyist.

Unfortunately, until the reputation of the “pit bull” is repaired, the inclusion of having a dog typed as such included in any sort of incident will continue to receive international attention.^{vii} The truth is, that there are more than ten million dogs in North America who could be typed as “pit bulls” who did nothing but love their families and sleep warm in their beds last night. That fact will never change and proves that the actions of any isolated incidents do not dictate the actions of all dogs of similar appearance.

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RESILIENCE OF “PIT BULL” TYPE DOGS

“Pit bull” type dogs have demonstrated countless times that they can be rehabilitated even after living in the most excruciating circumstances. One of the most famous examples of this is the 2007 case of the sick and disturbed Michael Vick; a former NFL quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons who was tried and convicted for his revolting role in funding a dog fighting operation known as Bad Newz Kennels³. These dogs were tortured, trained and forced to fight for survival, beaten, abused, and suffered the worst kind of neglect. Yet once rescued, 48 of the 51 dogs (94.1%) were successfully rehabilitated, and placed in loving families or no kill animal sanctuaries to live out their lives in peace and safety. Many of these dogs went on to be therapy dogs, and ALL dogs placed in families passed their Certified Good Canine Neighbor^{viii} testing with flying colors.

Not one of these dogs, known as the Victory Dogs, ever had an incident reported of aggression of any kind. Of the three dogs that were unable to be rehabilitated, two died due to their extreme injuries while in care, and one was humanely euthanized by the ASPCA as she was sadly deemed too emotionally and physically damaged to be rehabilitated. It was quickly discovered by the teams of rescuers that the biggest issue with these dogs was not aggression; it was fear. But, even after all the suffering and abuse they had endured in their short lives, they learned to trust again and showed their true colors; loyal, loving and forgiving!^{ix} Check out the documentary [“The Champions”](#) to learn more about their incredible journey to freedom.

² These photographs rarely can be proven as attributed to a dog typed as a “pit bull” however the imagery of a child who has been bitten by a dog, regardless of breed, is disturbing and deeply upsetting to witness.

³ While Vick was only convicted for his role in financing the operation, there is little doubt that he was intrinsically involved in the fighting operation as a whole.

A more current, local case is the case of the “Chatham 21”, where thirty one dogs were seized from a fighting ring in Chatham, Ontario in 2016. Twenty one of these dogs were kept in quarantine by the Ontario SPCA (OSPCA) for close to two years. Multiple animal rights organizations continued to lobby for the release of these dogs to rescue. [Dog Tales Rescue and Sanctuary](#) was even willing to cover the cost of transportation and rehabilitation for these dogs to avoid spending tax-payer dollars, but **still** they were kept in the custody of the OSPCA. Their release was continuously denied, partly due to BSL, and partly due to the fact they were being held as “evidence” in the alleged dog fighting case, amongst a list of other criminal charges. Finally, after two long years of fighting for their lives, the dogs were released to the care of Dog Tales and transported to rehabilitation sanctuaries in Florida. While at the sanctuaries they flourished, finally understanding that they were no longer going to be hurt or neglected. Some of these dogs are now fully trained law enforcement K9 officers, including police dogs and the very first arson detection “pit bull” in the USA. Others are living their best lives with their new families. One dog, K9 Hansel, an arson detection “pit bull” who works with the fire department in Millville, New Jersey, was honored as being in the top four dogs of the year by the CW Dogs of the Year presentation for 2020. Another dog, Maurice, is living his best life with his family, running free on the beaches in Los Angeles, California. For more information on these dogs, known on social media as the #OntarioRescuedDogs, as well as the Vicktory Dogs, please visit [Success Stories of BSL Survivors – the Vicktory Dogs and the #OntarioRescuedDogs](#).

These dogs are flourishing, and are making a difference in the lives of others, be it in their communities or their families. This is concrete proof that the most common factor and problem with dogs rescued from fighting operations is not aggression: it is fear. Many “pit bulls” rescued from fighting operations prove even the biggest doubters wrong. There is NO reason to believe that any dog formerly forced to fight does not deserve a chance to live a normal and safe life with a family who loves them and treats them well. The example of the #OntarioRescuedDogs dogs, originally deemed as “a dangerous menace to society” by the OSPCA who were unworthy of their lives, are so successfully integrating into society is a CLEAR demonstration of the true nature of dogs typed as “pit bulls” and the complete failure of BSL.

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LAW ENFORCEMENT AND “PIT BULL” TYPE DOGS

As mentioned above, there are more and more police forces throughout the United States who are training “pit bull” type dogs rescued from shelters as K9 unit dogs. This is proving to be a successful way to promote a positive image for an extremely misunderstood type of dog. “Pit bull” type dogs are being trained by organizations such as [Throw Away Dogs Project](#) to detect narcotics, bombs, and track missing persons/criminals on the run. They are also being trained as arson detection dogs, able to detect multiple different ignitable odors. They are very rarely used to “attack” or “apprehend” those who are being pursued, as one of the hardest things reported when it comes to training K9 “pit bulls” is that it is very difficult to get them to be aggressive towards people.

Any dog that has the drive, confidence, and desire to work can do detection dog work, and breed does not dictate their ability to succeed. Training rescued “pit bull” type dogs for use as K9 police dogs saves innocent lives and also tens of thousands of dollars of tax-payer money. For example, a pure breed German Shepherd police dog can cost up to 15,000\$ to purchase and train, whereas a rescued “pit bull” type dog is often less than 100\$ to adopt. “Pit bull” type dogs have also in general been deemed as extremely easy to train by K9 training professionals due to their natural will and desire to please their owners.*

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BREED SPECIFIC LEGISLATION

Breed Specific Legislation (BSL) is a law that targets a dog based on an appearance instead of a behavior. It singles out specific breeds or types of dogs with similar characteristics, and is a very ineffective way of dealing with dogs that pose a threat to public safety. Currently the dog being targeted by BSL in Ontario (and many other jurisdictions around the world) is the “pit bull” family of dogs. BSL itself is an over-inclusive and under-inclusive law to say the least, as I will explain.

Studies prove that in ALL cities across the world where BSL has been implemented, there has not been one municipality who has enforced it successfully. There has been no reduction of dog bites and no increase to public safety, as municipalities are concentrating all their efforts on one breed/type of dog rather than dealing with the individual problem dogs. In fact, because of this ineffectiveness, since 2016, there have been more than 100 municipalities in North America who have overturned their breed bans, with more being added to the list each day.^{xi}

BSL forces responsible owners to hide their well behaved dogs out of fear, possibly resulting in under-socialized dogs and the potential for problematic dog behavior. There are many issues associated with breed specific laws, including the inability of untrained law enforcement agents to accurately visually identify the breed of dog; a task virtually impossible even to experts such as the Canadian Kennel Club Association, SPCA's, and veterinarians.

Since the implementation of BSL in Ontario in 2005, statistics indicate that the number of dog bites in Ontario has increased, and that breeds not targeted by the current BSL have been responsible for more bites overall than “pit bull” type dogs. This is an important note, as the “pit bull” population (or dogs who have the potential to be typed as such) in Ontario has only minimally decreased. Ontario's BSL has resulted in the unnecessary euthanasia of thousands of innocent dogs and puppies, virtually none of whom had a history of violence against people or other animals. Thousands more have been torn apart from their heartbroken families because of nothing more than a perceived breed. It is impossible to understand why the Ontario government continues to practice BSL when there is such a serious negative effect, including the deterioration of mental health, on their own constituents.

It is commonly agreed upon by the public, as well as many progressive thinking political figures and law makers across multiple municipalities, that the onus of control should be placed on the owner of the dog, regardless of the breed. The responsibility of providing education to the public on how to approach an unknown dog should be a requirement in each city, and early childhood education should be included in the school curriculums to teach canine safety to children and their families. Some very simple instruction, such as teaching young children not to run up to a strange dog, to always ask permission before approaching a strange dog, or not reaching out to pet a strange dog without permission from the owner, would go a long way in preventing many incidents involving dog bites or attacks. The City of Calgary has an excellent canine training curriculum that they teach to elementary school children, including a coloring book called “Paws for Safety”.^{xii} Interestingly, Calgary does not have BSL, yet it has the lowest annually reported dog bites and highest dog registration rates in the country. Education and responsible ownership is key to the prevention of dog bites; banning a breed will only continue to provide a false sense of security to the general public.

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THE COST OF BSL

Costs involved in enforcing BSL are in the hundreds of thousands of tax-payer dollars, per municipality, annually. TENS OF MILLIONS are wasted across the province every year. These non-exhaustive costs include:

- seizures for suspected “pit bull” type dogs,

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- sheltering and general care of said dogs while the owner is given an opportunity to provide proof of breed,
- hiring of expert witnesses to attest to the dogs breed and age,
- possible euthanasia or transportation out of province,
- additional by-law officers for patrol and other law enforcement officials, and
- court time which includes, but is not limited to:
 - professional breed identification by a recognized canine expert,
 - court orders/warrants for seizure of the animal and trial proceedings, and
 - lawyer fees, municipal judge fees, and other court fees.

This is not including the personal cost to the owners. Owners are forced to hire experts, find veterinarians willing to identify the breed of their dog, hire lawyers, etc. This is another expense costing thousands of dollars. And for what? All because of the size of the dog's head, the shape of their body, or the color of their nose? Seems a little barbaric doesn't it?

There have been multiple court cases which have demonstrated the difficulties that municipalities have experienced when attempting to confirm that a dog meets the correct definition of "pit bull" as described by the Dog Owners Liability Act (DOLA). BSL costs taxpayers on average between \$800,000 and \$1,200,000 per municipality, per year, depending on the population size. If you take an estimated \$50,000,000 per year cost for enforcement of the entire province of Ontario, and multiply that by the ~15 years that BSL has been in place, you're looking at an estimated bill of approximately \$750,000,000, or roughly 6% of Ontario's current 11.7 billion dollar deficit. Using this as a very rough guideline, eliminating BSL could potentially save over \$50,000,000 per year of tax-payer money for the province, which could provide a substantial decrease in an ever growing mass deficit.^{xiii}

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BSL AND PUBLIC SAFETY

BSL creates a consistent and constant false sense of public safety. The often misinformed public generally assumes that with an animal control law in place such as BSL, it is virtually impossible that there is any chance to be attacked or bitten by a dog. This law exists solely to protect them against that, right? Wrong! Little do they know that BSL actually makes it **more** probable that they will be involved in some sort of dog related altercation, as this law often ignores problematic dogs who are not listed as "dangerous" breeds.

BSL is defended by those who implement it with the mentality of "we are putting people first". What these law makers don't realize is that BSL affects people just as much, sometimes more, than it affects targeted dogs. It is very difficult to understand how they do not see the lasting and painful effect to owners that occurs when a family pet is stripped away for no reason other than a perceived breed. Many people rely on their dogs for companionship, mental health, and safety. Enforcing BSL has a severe negative impact on the people whose pets are removed, as they are the ones left to live with the agony and suffering of having had their family pet needlessly sent away, or worse, destroyed. While dogs **may** never understand why they were taken away from their warm beds and their loving families, humans **will** never understand. BSL is proven to impact the mental health and well being these responsible owners; why is this not of significance to law makers?

It is a very common statement made by animal lovers that until you have personally experienced the love of a pet, you will never understand how strong the bond is between a human and an animal. While advocates do not generally disagree with the statement "we need to put humans first", what the government doesn't seem to understand is that BSL has a long lasting effect on those very people they deem to put first. As mentioned above, it has been proven that pets have a big part in mental health, daily companionship, and

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family bonds, therefore BSL is neglecting the “people first” mentality of their own statement. Remember: 1 dog destroyed due to BSL equals 1 family (quantity of humans varies) destroyed due to BSL.

In the City of Ottawa, officials have put in place a number of by-law provisions that require dog owners to identify, control by leash (or otherwise, as required), and clean up after their pets. By-law and regulatory services in the city have been successful in enforcing these provisions and holding dog owners accountable for their pets. In Ottawa there is an average of 450 dog bites and/or attacks every year; less than 2% of these bites or attacks involve “pit bull” type dogs. As there are an estimated 100,000 dogs in Ottawa, it is the position of bylaw and animal control to conclude that problematic dogs of **any** type are in the extremely small minority and the City chooses to deal with them on an individual basis rather than singling out an entire breed.^{xiv}

Between the years of 2005 until fall of 2016, there were 4113 dog bites recorded in Ottawa; only 16 of those were confirmed to be from “pit bull” type dogs or “pit bull” mixes. The other 4097 bites received very little media attention, however the 16 bites including “pit bull” type dogs/mixes were reported on thoroughly and often. The City of Ottawa has stated that it refuses to enforce the breed specific components of the Dog Owners Liability Act on “pit bull” type dogs for many reasons, including but not limited to the difficulty in enforcement, and extreme cost to the City. The fact that there are many well behaved and well socialized “pit bull” type dogs living peacefully in the City is further evidence that having BSL in place and singling out a certain type dogs is a discriminatory act towards the dog for no other reason than their appearance. “Pit bull” owners are almost instantly criminalized by the misinformed public due to the type of dog that they own, are constantly judged, and told by strangers that they shouldn’t have a dog “like that”. In some instances, “pit bull” owners are even denied house insurance. Crazy right?

In 2017, the Toronto city council unanimously passed amendments to the City’s bylaws governing dangerous dogs, which took effect on March 1, 2017. In this particular rendition of the bylaw, the City chose to remain completely breed neutral. They have stated that ANY dog deemed to be dangerous will not be allowed in areas such as off leash parks, that the dog deemed to be aggressive must be microchipped, and in the event of a bite or attack, must be muzzled in public, with the owner purchasing a dangerous dog tag from the city. This law also has banned the use of choke collars and choke chains, deemed it illegal to tether a pet for more than three consecutive hours, has made it a requirement for any pet remaining outdoors during extreme weather conditions have access to an enclosure that will protect them from the elements, and has increased the fines for the owners who do not comply with the new laws to a maximum of \$100,000. While this law is a step in the right direction and the City of Toronto, similar to the City of Ottawa, is to be commended on its position dealing with dangerous dogs on a breed neutral basis, until the overarching provincial BSL is lifted, it is still not 100% safe. All of these new requirements are promoting “responsible ownership”, which is what the focus should be when enforcing animal control laws of any kind. With the Provincial Animal Welfare Act (or PAWS) in place, there is no reason to continue the practice of BSL, as owners should all be held accountable for their individual pets, regardless of species or breed. Note that PAWS is not BSL or dog specific: it provides protection for many aspects of the animal welfare world, including pets, farm animals, and wildlife.⁴

The City of Calgary does not have any breed specific components in their bylaws, yet has the fewest annually reported dog bites in any major city in Canada. Calgary is the model that most Anti-BSL advocates desire for their own cities, as the onus of responsibility is placed on the owners and not the dogs. Having legislation that demands responsible ownership and is breed neutral is the legislation proven to ensure the well being of all dogs, and that public safety is achieved. The Maritime provinces do not enforce any type of provincial

⁴ See the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act (PAWS) for more details on regulations in the province with regards to animal welfare and care. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/animal-welfare>

BSL and “pit bull” type dogs are welcome to live there in safety and happiness in many cities such as Moncton, New Brunswick, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Halifax, Nova Scotia, and St. John’s, Newfoundland.

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BREED SPECIFIC LEGISLATION REPEALS – A GLOBAL TREND

Since 2016, more than 100 municipalities across North America have reversed their position on BSL and have removed it from their municipal legislation, replacing it with far more effective breed neutral laws focusing on responsible ownership. In the United States, there are 24 States that have laws prohibiting municipalities within their borders from enforcing BSL, with more joining the progressive thinking on dangerous dogs every day. Former President of the United States, Barak Obama, publicly stated that he does not support BSL: *“We don’t support breed-specific legislation – research shows that bans on certain types of dogs are largely ineffective and often a waste of public resources... As an alternative to breed-specific policies, the (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) recommends a community-based approach to prevent dog bites. And ultimately, we think that’s a much more promising way to build stronger communities of pets and pet owners.”*⁵ The American Bar Association has also stated for years that these sorts of bans and restrictions do extensive harm to families, dogs, due process, and the economy, without actually improving public safety.

For more people than can be counted, it is very frustrating that in a country who claims to be as accepting and proud of its diversity as Canada, we are still enforcing laws that are consistently being proven as ineffective ways to promote public safety. Experts throughout the world, including but not limited to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), the American and Canadian Kennel Clubs, the Montreal SPCA, the Ottawa and Toronto Humane Societies, and the American and Canadian Veterinary Medical Associations to name but a **few**, have all agreed that BSL is nothing more than a costly, ineffective, lazy policy making alternative to making cost effective laws with the protection and safety of the public in mind⁶. Right Honorable Justin Trudeau stated in an address to the United Nations in early 2016 that *“In Canada we see diversity as a source of strength, not weakness and our country is strong not in spite of our differences, but because of them.”* If we apply this logic to BSL, in the same way that there is no room in Canada for bigotry and racism towards each other, there is also no room for discrimination in Canada towards dogs and their owners based solely on appearances.

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CONCLUSION

The hypocrisy of Canada’s claims to be compassionate and diverse while Ontario continues to support the largest geographic breed ban in the world has many Canadians across the country deeply ashamed of the place we call home. Together we must stand by our words and reject discrimination and injustice in all forms. The compassion shown in Canada towards each other should not be limited to the treatment of humans; it should be inclusive of all sentient beings, which according to recent Quebec court ruling, includes animals⁷. Canadians have always fought for those who can’t fight for themselves, and now we are fighting for those who can’t even speak for themselves. In the year 2021, any form of legislated hate, discrimination, or prejudice is a disgusting scar to the value of compassion that Canadians hold very dear.

⁵ Note that this is an excerpt of the full White House statement. President Obama’s statement doesn’t speak to federal legislative efforts, however it demonstrates support from the previous White House administration to end BSL across the country.

⁶ For more information on professional position statements regarding BSL, please visit www.ontariocoalitionagainstbsl.com

⁷ [Bill 54 – An Act to improve the legal situation of animals in Quebec](#)

Ontario Warriors United Against BSL

April 2021

Bill 147 MUST move forward to third reading and Royal Assent in order to promote responsible ownership and accountability. Without it, good, law abiding citizens in Ontario will continue to be discriminated against, and treated as second class citizens. It is important for the citizens of this province continue the fight to end this gross injustice known as BSL. Only then can we all once again be proud of our deep Canadian values built on equality and compassion, and once again feel safe in the country that prides itself on peace, diversity, and acceptance.

“When injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty”.⁸

Alix Packard

Founder – Ottawa Citizens Against Breed Specific Legislation/BSL

Co-Founder – Ontario Coalition Against BSL

Co-Founder – Ontario Warriors United Against BSL

⁸ Thomas Jefferson: Papers and Biographies collections in Hathi Trust Digital Library

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- ^{xi} [BSL Repeals – 2016 to present](#)
- ^{xii} [Paws for Safety – a coloring book for children](#)
- ^{xiii} [Ontario Advocates Response to BSL: Assessment of the Breed Specific Components of Ontario's Dog Owners Liability Act - Chapter 8](#)
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