

## FAQs About Breed Specific Legislations

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Over the past few years, I have become involved with trying to educate about a type of law commonly referred to as a BSL. Here are some frequently asked questions regarding this growing and frightening trend:

*What is a BSL?*

BSL stands for Breed Specific Legislation. A BSL can be anything from requiring special licensing of a breed or breeds (breed restriction) to the total elimination of a breed (breed ban).

*Why are BSL bad?*

BSL fail to target the problem: bad dog owners. Those who are causing the problems with their dogs will not care about the law. Either these owners will continue to own the breeds mentioned in the BSL or dump the dogs, get a new breed and continue the cycle. Alternatively, a restriction will make the breeds more attractive to those who get a feeling of power by intentionally breaking the law. Some owners are simply poorly educated and do not know what it takes to properly raise, train, socialize and manage any dog. Owners who are intentionally bad or owners who are undereducated and irresponsible are the problems that need to be addressed. In addition, BSL are tough to enforce, expensive and often very vague with their descriptions of breeds.

*Aren't the dogs mentioned in BSLs dangerous?*

Any dog can be a risk. Even small breeds have seriously injured and killed children. An American Pit Bull Terrier in a good home is a safer dog than a Dachshund in a poor home. Humans decide how safe the individual dog will be. In the majority of dog problems, there is the owner to blame. The dog ends up as much of a victim in many respects. Is the dog to blame? No, he is just reflecting the owner. You can tell a lot about a person through his dogs.

*If any dog can be dangerous, why are only certain breeds targeted?*

These breeds are targeted because of a lack of education. Legislators and the public do not take the time to learn the truth behind many breeds mentioned in BSL. Instead, they believe hype and information from undereducated and unreliable sources. The people creating the most problem with dogs are: those using dogs as status symbols for the wrong reasons; undereducated owners who do not realize the time it takes to properly raise any dog; those who unintentionally allow undesired behaviors to grow and fail to address them. How many people let tiny pups play tug of war with their hands or feet?

Are they aware that this actually teaches the pup it is good to bite humans when playing? Children often unintentionally or intentionally do things that can lead to a bite: teasing, inappropriate play, trying to pat strange dogs, scaring dogs, etc. It looks better for lawmakers to ban a breed than to target the true source of the problem with supposedly killer breeds: often young, unsupervised, poorly raised kids or the irresponsible adult looking for another status symbol to prove machismo. There is little personal accountability any more. If something is being used for the bad, take it away from all as opposed to targeting the source of the bad – the human. Let us make an analogy: as this is being written, there is a lawsuit against fast food restaurants: they are being blamed for obesity. A person can find salads, juice and milk at these fast food places or choose a smaller burger, fries and drink. Yes, the employees try to sell super-sized stuff, but you do not have to buy it. A person can eat unhealthily at any restaurant from Beverly Hills to Boston. Yet only fast food places are being targeted. Where is personal accountability? What lawmaker will join the cause and try to restrict fast food places and what they can serve? Can you make the analogy? Any dog can be a problem. Regardless of the breed, the human decides what the dog becomes. Personal accountability: who is in control of the dog?

*If it is the human causing the problem, why not target the owners?*

That is what people opposed to BSL are trying to do: get legislators to address the root of the problem without punishing the good. However, legislators are often poorly educated and/or use the wrong sources for their information. They go by what is printed in the media and not reality. It looks better in the eyes of the undereducated to blame the dog than the human.

*What if a lawmaker states they can positively identify a dangerous breed?*

Breed identification is tough. The descriptions lawmakers use to try to identify "dangerous breeds" are often vague:

*(1) The XYZ is a strongly built, medium-sized, short-coupled dog possessing a sound, athletic, well-balanced conformation that enables it to function... Physical features and mental characteristics should denote a dog bred to perform as an efficient... The most distinguishing characteristics of the XYZ are its short, dense, weather resistant coat... a clean-cut head with broad back skull and moderate stop; powerful jaws...*

*(2) The ABC should give the impression of great strength for his size, a well put-together dog, muscular, but agile and graceful, keenly alive to his surroundings. He should be stocky, not long-legged or racy in outline. Head: Medium length, deep through, broad skull, very pronounced cheek muscles, distinct stop; and ears are set high. Muzzle: medium length, rounded on upper side to fall away abruptly below eyes. Jaws well defined.*

What breeds are defined here? Both are American Kennel Club recognized and wording taken directly from the AKC standards. One is a breed often mentioned in bans under a generic name. The other is one often touted as the perfect pet.

*What can I do to stop BSL?*

When you hear of a BSL anywhere, start writing letters, faxes, phone calls, emails, etc. In a calm, rational and non-insulting manner, try to educate lawmakers about why BSL are not the way to go when addressing dog issues. Push for laws that target the owner regardless of the type of dog owned. Encourage them to create leash laws and see they are enforced. Increase penalties for animal abuse, cruelty and the use of animals as weapons. In many communities, it is a misdemeanor to neglect or abuse an animal. Lastly, encourage owners of breeds not mentioned to become involved with the fight.

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