



# City of Columbia

701 East Broadway, Columbia, Missouri 65201

Department Source: Public Health and Human Services

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: October 7, 2019

Re: Specific Dog Breed Bans

## Executive Summary

At Council's request, staff has prepared a report on breed-specific legislation (BSL), primarily for pit bulls.

## Discussion

At the September 3, 2019 City Council meeting, PHHS was asked to look into specific dog breed bans, primarily for pit bulls. In preparing this report, staff reviewed local data, guidance from national organizations, consulted with animal control partners within Columbia, and reviewed the Springfield, MO ordinance.

Breed specific legislation (BSL) usually targets dogs of larger stature, muscular build, and other physical characteristics that are generally associated with aggression. In addition to Pit Bulls, BSL commonly outlaws Rottweilers, Akitas, Mastiffs, Dobermans, Presa Canarios, Dogo Argentinos, and even more traditionally family friendly breeds like Dalmatians and Chow Chows.

Legislation generally bans breeds by describing the breed by name, type, and physical characteristics. Today, breed bans almost exclusively focus on one breed: the pit bull. However, a "pit bull" is not necessarily a single breed, but a rough categorization of three or more breeds: the American Pit Bull Terrier, the American Staffordshire Terrier, and the Staffordshire Bull Terrier.

Staff reviewed information available online from the national dog bite victims' group, Dogsbite.org. The organization compiles annual reports of dog bite fatalities based on news reporting, review of police reports, social media account reviews and other parameters. It also maintains a listing of municipalities who have adopted breed-specific legislation, bans, restrictions, dangerous/vicious declarations, and mandatory sterilization requirements. According to the website, as of August 6, 2017, there are 90 municipalities in Missouri that have enacted BSL in some form (Missouri breed specific laws). In the vast majority, the legislation is specific to pit bulls, although some include other large breeds such as rottweilers, doberman pinchers, etc.

The position statement from the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) was considered. The AVMA states breed-specific legislation "is not a reliable or effective solution for dog bite prevention" and they oppose such legislation. Their reasons for opposing such legislation are as follows:



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- Breed-specific laws can be difficult to enforce, especially when a dog's breed can't easily be determined or if it is of mixed breed (many pit bulls are a mixed breed).
- Breed-specific legislation is discriminatory against responsible owners of their dogs.
- Breed bans do not address the social issue of irresponsible pet ownership.
- It is not possible to calculate a bite rate for a breed or to compare rates between breeds because the data reported is often unreliable.

Also considered was the position statement of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) who also stands in strong opposition to breed-specific legislation. In the position statement, the organization notes that "it must also be considered that if limited animal control resources are used to regulate or ban a certain breed of dog, the focus is shifted away from routine, effective enforcement of laws that have the best chance of making communities safer: dog license laws, leash laws, animal fighting laws, anti-tethering laws, laws facilitating animal sterilization and laws that require guardians of all dog breeds to control their pets."

Dog bites are a reportable condition in Missouri. In 2018, there were 121 reported dog bites in the Columbia city limits. For the purposes of this report, breed is defined as what the Animal Control Officer believes the dog most resembles, with recognition that most of the bites listed are likely mixed breeds. There were 25 bites by dogs listed as pit bull and 19 by labrador retrievers (2018 City of Columbia Animal Dog Bites by Breed). This report only includes bites reported to PHHS, generally by healthcare providers. Bites that do not result in a visit to a healthcare professional likely go unreported.

Staff reached out to local animal welfare organizations to get feedback on BSL. Consistently, responses indicate partners are not in favor of such an ordinance. Of note, the Central Missouri Humane Society stated that if the City were to pass a ban on pit bulls, they would no longer accept that breed of dog from the general public, nor would they accept that breed from Animal Control.

The mid-Missouri communities of Boonville, Fayette, New Franklin, and Glasgow previously enacted breed-specific legislation which has since been repealed. Springfield Missouri does not ban pit bulls; however, they do have an ordinance that requires pit bull owners to register them.

Genetic testing, at a cost ranging from \$50-\$150 per test, is available to identify the breed mixes that make up most pets. Having pit bull DNA does not mean that a dog will be aggressive, nor does looking like a pit bull. A dog's physical appearance is not an objective test of animal behavior. Dogs of similar appearance and breed frequently have different behavioral traits the same way that human siblings can have different personalities.

A potential unintended consequence of BSL is that owners of banned breeds may be deterred from seeking routine veterinary care, which can lead to outbreaks of rabies and other diseases that endanger communities.



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Based on a review of the literature and feedback from local stakeholders, staff does not endorse breed-specific legislation and believes that emphasis should continue to be focused on requiring pet owners to be responsible for their pets, regardless of the breed.

## Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: None

Long-Term Impact: None

## Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

### Strategic Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Public Safety, Secondary Impact: Not Applicable, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

### Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Livable & Sustainable Communities, Secondary Impact: Not applicable, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

## Legislative History

Date	Action
	To staff's knowledge, there has never been breed specific legislation in the City of Columbia.

## Suggested Council Action

Staff requests Council accept the report and provide direction.