



Responsible Regulation

When dogs attack, the first question is “what type of dog was it?” It appears the public’s perception of aggression lies entirely on breed and not on the type environment or circumstance the dog and or person were in. The opinion to blame the breed is not at all far-fetched considering most people get their information from the media and un-accredited sources. In actuality the *real* facts directly contradict this “breed theory”.

In August 2013, the Federal Government spoke out against Breed Discriminatory Laws(BDL) and this was the official White House response to a petition to end BDL: “We don’t support Breed Specific Laws, research shows that bans on certain types of dogs are largely ineffective and often a waste of public resources. In 2000, the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) looked at 20 years of data about dog bites and human fatalities in the US. They found that fatal attacks represent a very small portion of dog bite injuries to people and that it is virtually impossible to calculate bites for specific breeds. The CDC also notes that the types of people who look to exploit dogs aren’t deterred by breed regulations-when their communities establish a ban, these people just seek out new, unregulated breeds. The simple fact is that dogs of any breed can become dangerous when they are intentionally or unintentionally raised to be aggressive. For all those reasons, the CDC officially recommends against BDL, which they call inappropriate.”

The American Journal of Sociology Research performed a study in 2013 addressing the issues with designating breeds to dogs of unknown parentage or “mixed breed dogs” called *Comparison of Visual and DNA Breed Identification of Dogs and Inter-Observer Reliability*. Head Researcher Dr. Victoria Voith from the College of Veterinary Medicine, Western University of Health Sciences (Pomona, CA) in conjunction with the Centers for Shelter Dogs/Animal Rescue League of Boston worked with 900 participants from dog related organizations (Vet groups/Animal control/Dog clubs, etc.). The research concluded that: The disparities between visual and DNA Identification of the breed composition of dogs and the low agreement among people who identified dogs raises questions concerning the accuracy of databases which supply demographic data on dog breeds, as well as the justification and ability to implement laws and private restrictions pertaining to dogs based on breed composition. Dr. Voith noted that this was not surprising. Dogs have 20-25,000 genes and less than 1% of the dogs’ genes control the external morphological features associated with specific breeds of dogs (ear shape, length of legs, color of coat, length of coat, shape of head, length of muzzle, etc.). Voith explains, “A dog could be 50% German Shepherd and lack the genomic regions responsible for the GSD size, coat, muzzle length and ear properties.”

Janis Bradley, CTC, founder and trainer of The Dog Training Internship Academy, Author and former faculty at SPCA San Francisco Academy of Dog Training states, “There is no documented genetic correlation of a certain appearance and the likelihood of a certain behavior in any dog, even pure bred dogs with a closed gene pool,” and furthermore, “The ‘Behavioral Hygiene’, which includes how you interact with and what you do with a dog, plays a much more significant role in behavior and is much more likely to influence behavior than physical appearances.”

With this long-standing research by scientists along with accredited behaviorists, veterinarians, and trainers, it is now time to evolve and use this data to keep our communities safe, while encouraging responsible dog ownership. A shining example of a decrease in dog bites and increase in public safety is the *Calgary Responsible Pet Ownership By-Law*. The Calgary Responsible Pet Ownership & By-law Services proposes 5 principles to keeping communities safe. In addition to advocating against breed specific policy it rewards its responsible pet owners with a program called “I Heart My Pet Rewards Program”, which provides owners with a card that gives discounts from more than 60 partnering vendors. The 5 Principles are:

1. License and provide permanent Identification for pets.
2. Spay and neuter pets.
3. Provide training, physical care, socialization and medical attention for companion animals.
4. Do not allow pets to become a threat or nuisance in the community.
5. Procure your pet ethically and from a credible source.

Under this by- law, by 3 months of age all cats and dogs residing within the city limits must have a license. Some of the services and programs those license fees fund are:

- Educating the community about responsible pet ownership.
- Delivering public education materials to residents.
- Managing adoption programs.
- Running a volunteer socialization program.
- Helping neighbors resolve animal related conflicts.
- Operating No cost spay/neuter programs for cats and dogs of eligible citizens.

To be at the forefront of public safety and allocate our tax dollars efficiently, we need to use this research to ensure humane treatment of companion animals. Thankfully we now have data that will free us of the antiquated, unsuccessful, and costly laws which have historically been proven ineffective, inhumane and discriminatory. Public safety is a top priority for *all* pet owners, regardless of what type of dog they have.

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