



PITBULL T★E★A★M



Effective Advocacy Against BDL in EVERY STATE!

Breed Discriminatory Legislation (BDL) or Breed Specific Legislation (BSL) affects communities from San Francisco, California to Miami, Florida and countless municipalities in between. Many dog owners and animal lovers want to help, but are unsure of whom to contact, how to contact them, and what to say when they do. One of the easiest and most effective ways to combat proposed BDL in your community is to let your voice be heard EARLY and OFTEN by lawmakers and members of your local government and to serve as a role model for responsible pet ownership where you reside.



BDL or BSL is exactly what it sounds like, regulation of your right to own or, in many cases, not own a dog based solely on the breed or "type" of dog, not your responsibility as an owner.¹ While many dog breeds can be targeted in breed *discriminatory* legislation, the most targeted dog in America is the pit bull terrier, which is not a breed, by the way, but a term used to describe about 20 potential breeds of dogs simply because they have thick necks and brick-shaped heads.² We, as pit bull type dog owners and/or advocates know that lots of breeds have similar characteristics, leading to confusion when using a set of such characteristics to target specific dogs. Could you distinguish between a Pit Bull, an Alapaha Blue Blood Bulldog, the Dogo Argentino, or a Bull Mastiff? You may think you can, but try to take the test here: <http://www.pitbullsontheweb.com/petbull/findpit.html>

Various countries and U.S. cities have tried to ban certain breeds of dogs to reduce dog bites and attacks. Much to their surprise, actual dog bite and attack numbers actually go up after breed discriminatory legislation is enacted. That's because the focus is no longer on keeping the community safe from dangerous dogs; instead, the focus is on making sure people don't have certain breeds of dogs and that can lead to all sort of lawsuits because dog breed identification can be a difficult thing to do, even for the most experienced animal person.³ In "The Pit Bull Placebo" by Karen Delise, the author explains that BDL chooses to blatantly ignore the dangerous and irresponsible behavior of dog owners and instead places the blame for these attacks squarely on the back of a "breed of dog." BDL does

¹ www.pbrc.net

² From: Cathy M. Rosenthal's blog "Animals Matter" www.blog.mysanantonio.com

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nothing to address the real factors which contribute to canine aggression and have been found consistently in cases of fatal dog attacks over the past century, which are:

- *Dogs obtained and maintained for negative functions—This includes dogs obtained for fighting, guarding, and protection, dogs used for intimidation or as status symbols, and dogs being bred for financial gain.*
- *Failure of owners to humanely care for and control their dogs—This includes owners who maintain dogs on chains or allow dogs to run loose, owners who fail to socialize, train and supervise their dogs, owners who abuse or neglect their dogs, and owners who allow or encourage their dogs to behave aggressively.*
- *Young unsupervised children and dogs—This includes newborns left alone with dogs, young children allowed to interact with unfamiliar dogs or children allowed to play with multiple resident dogs (pack) without adult supervision.*
- *Reproductive status of dog—This includes intact animals actively used for breeding, bitches guarding puppies, pregnant bitches, and intact males in the vicinity of a female dog in estrus.*⁴

Denver and Miami are two of the U.S. cities with the most long-standing and divisive breed bans in the country. The Denver Pit Bull Ban was enacted in 1987 after one particular dog attacked a man. The story published afterward erroneously reported that a "slew" of attacks was what led to the ban, which has resulted in the execution of over 3,497 dogs.⁵ Today, hundreds of pit bull owners have re-settled to the suburbs around Denver and are making their voices heard. A drive to place an issue on the Denver ballot this November to overturn the city's pit bull ban has become an international petition. The goal of the petition, according to David Edelstein of the sponsoring Team-Pit-A-Full, is to "send a message to city officials that we are not letting this (issue) go quietly into the night as they would have it."⁶ This is on the tail of a hot debate last year about whether the city would comply with the American's with Disabilities Act granting disabled people the right to have pit bulls as service dogs in Denver. They complied with the ADA but have NOT removed the ordinance for breed bans.

In Miami Dade County American Pit Bull Terriers, American Staffordshire Terriers, Staffordshire Bull Terriers and their Mixes are illegal. In August 2012 a vote to overturn the ban enacted in 1989 was disappointing to say the least. The vote was 63.2 percent to 36.8 percent to *keep* the ban, leading

⁴ Delise, Karen. *The Pitbull Placebo: The Media, Myths, and Politics of Canine Aggression*. © 2007, Anubis Publishing (pg 197).

⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/10/07/denver-pit-bull-ban-distu_n_313171.html

⁶ Davidson, John. "Pro-Pit Bull Group Tries New Strategy to Overturn Pit Bull Ban." Posted January 6, 2012 at <http://blogs.denverpost.com/fetch>

advocacy groups to re-double their efforts in educating the public about pit bull type dogs.⁷ Miami's breed ban is in the press again after Marlin's pitcher Mark Buehrle and his wife were forced to relocate outside of the county due to their beloved pit bull, Slater.⁸ After being traded to Toronto, he was faced with yet another pit bull breed ban in Ontario and had to make the difficult decision to leave his family (fur-kids included) behind in Florida and St. Louis homes because Slater was not allowed in the province. Both Mark and his wife, Jamie, are active pit bull advocates and recently appeared in ads for Adopt-A-Pet. This situation has brought even more attention to the baseless practice of breed discriminatory legislation.

The point here is clear... *BDL does not work*. It is both a public safety *and* an ethical failure. The Miami Coalition Against Breed Specific Legislation clearly points out the reasons why:

- **BDL** does not improve public safety or prevent dog bites.
- **BDL** ignores the plight of victims and potential victims of non-targeted breeds.
- **BDL** is costly.
- **BDL** requires each and every dog to be identified as a breed—something that has proven impossible to do accurately and objectively.
- **BDL** makes targeted breeds more desirable to irresponsible and criminal owners.
- **BDL** does nothing to make irresponsible dog owners accountable.
- **BDL** punishes responsible dog owners.
- *Not a single* canine welfare organization supports **BDL**

Adapted From: <http://www.mcabsl.wildapricot.org/bsl>

While it is easy to point out the shortcomings of Breed Discriminatory Legislation, as pit bull advocates we need to be prepared with *positive* alternative suggestions. Instead of blaming a particular breed and demonizing the dog, we need to tackle the real issues of dog bites and attacks head on by focusing on the owner. We do this through better dog ownership and licensing laws regardless of breed, stricter spay and neuter regulations, abuse prevention, and dog safety education for both children and parents. It is in these ways we regulate irresponsible dog ownership and take the blame off the breed by putting responsibility squarely on the owner.

One of the most important actions you can take if you are the proud owner of a bully breed dog is to be a walking, talking role model for responsible dog ownership in your own community. Here is a list of some things you **SHOULD** do (adapted from CHAKO Pit Bull Rescue)⁹ as a responsible Pit Bull owner:



- **Walk your dog** on a secure leash and collar.

⁷ Brecher, Elinor J. "In Miami-Dade, Pit Bulls Remain Illegal." Miami Herald, August 15, 2012. <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/08/13/2951979/pit-bulls-remain-illegal-in-miami.html>

⁸ The Associated Press, "Blue Jays Pitcher Mark Buehrle Will Live Apart From Family and Dog as Toronto has Ban Against Pit Bull Breeds." NY Daily Press, February 17, 2013. <http://www.nydailynews.com/sports/baseball/puppy-lovesick-buehrle-bring-dogs-toronto-article-1.1266495>

⁹ <http://www.chako.org/responsible-dog-owner.html>

- **Contain your dog.** Make sure your dog cannot get out of your house or yard by ensuring you take proper containment measures. If you have a yard, make sure your fence is secure, and do not to leave your dog free in the back yard unsupervised for long periods.
- **Train your dog** and make sure your dog is well socialized to many different people, places, sounds, surfaces, and experiences.
- **Spay or neuter** your dog unless you have a dog that is registered with a legitimate kennel club like the AKC, UKC, or ADDBA and you are actively showing your dog or working your dog toward one or more sporting/obedience titles.
- **Get regular vet checkups** and appropriate vaccinations for your dog.
- **CGC and ATTS:** Consider getting your dog its canine good citizen certification and look into the ATTS.
- **Shhh!** Do not allow your dog to bark incessantly and disturb your neighbors.
- **Help your dog find its way home.** Mistakes happen. Dogs get lost or stolen. Consider getting your dog a permanent form of identification, such as a microchip.
- **Scoop poop!** When walking your dog in public, make sure to carry poop bags and pick up after your dog.
- **Exercise and Socialize!** Make sure your dog gets plenty of exercise and is a part of your family, not left outside alone, whether on a chain, in a kennel or the garage. Dogs are social creatures, and they need plenty of human interaction.

Now that you are armed with FACTS to combat the MYTHS often associated with pit bull type dogs, and are acting as a positive role model in your community, what else can you do if BDL is proposed where *you* live? First and foremost, you must monitor proposed legislation in your local newspapers, city council agendas, and your state legislature. Most of the resources you need to do this can be found online. The following links will help you to take the next step and *contact your local legislator to urge them to vote against specific bills:*

First, locate your local legislators:

<http://www.ncsl.org/about-us/ncslservice/state-legislative-websites-directory.aspx>

Next, adapt the following sample letter courtesy of the AKC that can be customized **to oppose a city or county council's breed-specific legislation, or BSL on the state level:**

(See our PDF for a sample letter)

THANK YOU for taking the time to be an *ACTIVE ADVOCATE* and welcome to the **T.E.A.M.** 😊