

In the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, communities - even countries - began passing laws that regulated, or banned, dogs based upon their breed or appearance.

These laws break our bond with man's best friend. Dogs are sometimes seized and killed for no other reason than their appearance. Animal shelters destroy countless thousands or millions of dogs, rather than attempt to place them in loving homes. Pet owners may face the grisly choice of submitting to expensive and onerous requirements, giving up their homes and moving, or turning over a cherished family companion for destruction.

Some governments have stubbornly persisted with such laws, focusing on the dog and its breed, rather than the dog and its relationship with human beings, despite the documented failure of *breed specific legislation* (BSL) to produce the intended outcome, a reduction of dog bite incidents.

## CRUEL AND INEFFECTIVE

Some governments have stubbornly persisted with such laws, focusing on the dog and its breed, rather than the dog and its relationship with human beings, despite the documented failure of *breed specific legislation* (BSL) to produce the intended outcome, a reduction of dog bite incidents.

The record of ineffectiveness comes to us from both Europe and North America.

### Spain

A study published in the Journal of Veterinary Behavior (2007) showed the Dangerous Animals Act (2000), which targeted a number of breeds of dogs, had no impact on reducing dog-related injuries. <sup>i</sup>

### Italy

In 2009, Italy abolished its breed-specific regulations, which applied to 17 breeds of dogs, in favor of legislation that holds individual dog owners responsible for their dog's behavior. Italy's Undersecretary Francesca Martini reported, "The measures adopted in the previous laws had no scientific basis. Dangerous breeds do not exist."<sup>ii</sup>

### Great Britain

A consultation conducted by Britain's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) confirmed that public sentiment overwhelmingly favors repeal of the UK's breed-specific law. 88% of the respondents stated that the current legislation is not effective in protecting the public; and 71% called for repeal. <sup>iii</sup>

In a related development, a bill introduced in 2010 to repeal the breed-specific provisions of the UK's Dangerous Dogs Act has successfully passed its second reading in the House of Lords. Lord Rupert Redesdale's "Dog Control Act" will make individual owners responsible for their dogs' behavior. <sup>iv</sup>

## Netherlands

Near the end of 2008, the Dutch government repealed a nationwide ban on pit bulls that had continued for 15 years.<sup>v</sup> The government had commissioned a study of the ban's effectiveness, which had revealed that banning a breed of dogs was not a successful dog bite mitigation strategy. Instead, the researchers recommended better education for children and adults on proper interactions with dogs.<sup>vi</sup>

## Canada

In Winnipeg, Manitoba, after the city enacted a breed ban in 1990, reports of dog bites actually increased. Though the number has since fallen from those highs, citizens reported roughly the same number of dog bites in 2009 as they did in the year the ban was passed.<sup>vii</sup>

The Province of Ontario enacted a breed ban in 2005. In 2010, the Toronto Humane Society surveyed municipalities across the province to see whether or not the law had resulted in a reduction of dog bite incidents. The responding municipalities reported that, despite 5 years of BSL and the destruction of "countless" dogs, there had been no significant decrease in the number of dog bites.<sup>viii</sup>

## United States

Denver, Colorado enacted a ban in 1989. Thousands of dogs have been seized and killed, some literally snatched from their owners' arms. All of this government-sanctioned animal cruelty has produced no increase in public safety. In fact, Denver's citizens have suffered a higher rate of hospitalizations for dog bite-related injuries than neighboring breed-neutral Boulder, which has half the population of Denver.<sup>ix</sup>

Miami-Dade County, Florida, also enacted a ban in 1989. There has been no significant decrease in dog bite related injuries.<sup>x</sup>

## **RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP: THE HUMANE PATH TO COMMUNITY SAFETY**

In 2006, Calgary, Alberta, enacted a breed-neutral Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw built on four simple yet important principles: license and provide permanent identification for pets; spay or neuter pets; provide training, socialization, proper diet and medical care for pets; do not allow pets to become a threat or nuisance.<sup>xi</sup> By educating its citizens to these principles, facilitating their compliance with them, and backing that up with rigorous enforcement when necessary, Calgary Animal Services has achieved a combined record of compassion for animals and safety for human citizens without equal anywhere in the world. In 2009, 86% of the dogs handled by Animal Services were returned to their owners. Fewer than 5% were euthanized.

Further, in 2009, this city of over 1 million people had reports of only 159 dog bites, of which 101 did not even break the skin. No community in Europe or North America can boast such a record of safety around dogs.<sup>xii</sup>

## **A HIGHER STANDARD FOR ALL**

There is no scientific evidence that one kind of dog is more likely to bite or injure a human being than another kind of dog;<sup>xiii</sup> and in no event should dogs be characterized apart from their relationships with human beings. We call on all communities and nations to recognize these fundamental truths; to honor the special relationship between dogs and human beings; to repeal cruel and ineffective breed specific regulations; and to hold all owners to a high standard of humane care, custody and control of all dogs, regardless of breed or type.

- 
- <sup>i</sup> B. Rosado et al, "Spanish dangerous animals act: Effect on the epidemiology of dog bites," *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* (2007) 2, 166-174.
- <sup>ii</sup> <http://www.iadcro.com/italia.html> (Accessed December 21, 2010)
- <sup>iii</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/dangerous-dogs/101125-dangerous-dogs-responses.pdf> (Accessed December 21, 2010)
- <sup>iv</sup> [http://www.bva.co.uk/public/documents/Dog\\_Control\\_Bill\\_2010\\_PR\\_-\\_Second\\_Reading.pdf](http://www.bva.co.uk/public/documents/Dog_Control_Bill_2010_PR_-_Second_Reading.pdf) (Accessed December 21, 2010)
- <sup>v</sup> [http://www.expatica.com/nl/news/local\\_news/Dutch-Agriculture-Minister-scraps-pit-bull-ban.html](http://www.expatica.com/nl/news/local_news/Dutch-Agriculture-Minister-scraps-pit-bull-ban.html) (Accessed December 21, 2010)
- <sup>vi</sup> Cornelissen, J.M.R., Hopster, H. "Dog bites in The Netherlands: A study of victims, injuries, circumstances and aggressors to support evaluation of breed specific legislation," *The Veterinary Journal* (2009), doi: 10.1016/j.tvjl.2009.10.001.
- <sup>vii</sup> <http://www.chrisd.ca/blog/25978/winnipeg-dog-bites-coalition-canada-post-manitoba-hydro-humane-society> (Accessed December 21, 2010); <http://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/dog-bites/dog-bites-worldwide/> (Accessed December 21, 2010)
- <sup>viii</sup> <http://www.torontosun.com/news/torontoandgta/2010/04/28/13753106.html> (Accessed December 21, 2010)
- <sup>ix</sup> <http://www.thedenverdailynews.com/article.php?aID=3473> (Accessed December 21, 2010)
- <sup>x</sup> <http://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/Miami-Dade1.pdf> (Accessed December 21, 2010)
- <sup>xi</sup> <http://www.calgary.ca/docgallery/bu/cityclerks/23m2006.pdf> (Accessed December 21, 2010)
- <sup>xii</sup> Personal correspondence with Bill Bruce, Director of Calgary Animal and Bylaw services.
- <sup>xiii</sup> B. Beaver et al. "A community approach to dog bite prevention," *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, Vol 218, No. 11, June 11, 2001, pp 1732-1749