

OBAMA ADMINISTRATION OPPOSES BREED-SPECIFIC LEGISLATION

In an unprecedented initiative, the White House released a statement yesterday stating that the Obama Administration does not support breed-specific legislation (BSL). The statement, now posted online¹, was a response to an anti-BSL petition created last December which quickly garnered more than 30,000 pet-loving signatures.

Referring to the position taken more than a decade ago by the Centers for Disease Control, an agency of the US Department of Health and Human Services, the White House reminded readers that “research shows that bans on certain types of dogs are largely ineffective and often a waste of public resources.”

While we are thrilled to read the White House statement, we want to point out that research shows that breed bans and other breed discriminatory regulation are completely ineffective and, in consequence, a total waste of public resources.

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The White House emphasized the critical husbandry issues that are inseparable from the human-canine bond. The White House also pointed out that that it is impossible to calculate bite rates by specific breeds. In support of the White House position, extensive surveys on both coasts have shown that visual breed identification of dogs of unknown parentage correlates extremely poorly with DNA analysis^{2,3}; and that observers, even animal professionals, may disagree with each other when guessing at the breed or breeds in the same dog⁴. Poor correlation with DNA analysis and inter-observer disagreement call into question media reports about dog bites, and, more importantly, the reliability of past epidemiological studies that attempted to correlate dog bite-related injuries with breed.

The Administration has now lent its weight to the official position against BSL previously adopted by the CDC. As the CDC did, the Administration refers readers to the community-based approach described in the landmark paper, “A community approach to dog-bite prevention,” which was the work of the American Veterinary

Medical Association's (AVMA) Task Force on Canine Aggression and Human-Canine Interaction⁵. The AVMA's analysis and recommendation was published in 2001, and has been publicly available for many years. A more recent review of the literature of controlled studies of dog bites published by AVMA last year covered 40 years and two continents and concluded that no type of dog should be considered disproportionately dangerous⁶.

A community approach can be seen in the responsible pet ownership model so successfully implemented in Calgary, Alberta.

In addition to the White House and the Centers for Disease Control, BSL is opposed by major national organizations, including the Humane Society of the United States, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Best Friends Animal Society, the American Veterinary Medical Association, and the National Animal Control Association. Last summer, the American Bar Association's House of Delegates passed a resolution urging "all state, local and territorial legislative bodies and agencies" to repeal any BSL currently in place⁷.

Official sentiment against BSL has been growing substantially. Recently, Massachusetts, Nevada, Connecticut and Rhode Island all passed state laws that prohibit their towns and counties from regulating dogs on the basis of breed. 16 states now prohibit BSL.

From January 2012 - May 2013, more than three times as many American jurisdictions have either repealed existing BSL, or declined to enact BSL, as have put BSL into effect.

The White House statement is the highest profile example yet of how the tide has turned against BSL at every level of government. It is important to keep the momentum going, in favor of community models that hold all dog owners responsible for the humane care, custody and control of their dogs, regardless of breed or appearance.

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SOURCES

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- ² Voith, V.L., Ingram, E., Mitsouras, K., & Irizarry, K. (2009). Comparison of Adoption Agency Identification and DNA Breed Identification of Dogs. *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 12(3), 253-262.
- ³ Levy, J.K. (2012). *DNA and Survey Results: What Kind of a Dog Is That?* Retrieved from <http://sheltermedicine.vetmed.ufl.edu/library/research-studies/current-studies/dog-breeds/dna-results/>
- ⁴ Voith, V.L., Trevejo, R., Dowling-Guyer, S., Chadik, C., Marder, A., Johnson, V., & Irizarry, K. (2013). Comparison of Visual and DNA Breed Identification of Dogs and Inter-Observer Reliability. *American Journal of Sociological Research*, 3(2), 17-29. Retrieved from: <http://article.sapub.org/10.5923.j.sociology.20130302.02.html>
- ⁵ American Veterinary Medical Association: Task Force on Canine Aggression and Human-Canine Interaction. (2001). A Community Approach to Dog Bite Prevention. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 218(11), 1732-1749. Retrieved from: <https://www.avma.org/public/Health/Documents/dogbite.pdf>
- ⁶ American Veterinary Medical Association: Animal Welfare Division. (2012). *Dog Bite Risk and Prevention: The Role of Breed*. Retrieved from: <https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Backgrounders/Pages/The-Role-of-Breed-in-Dog-Bite-Risk-and-Prevention.aspx>
- ⁷ American Bar Association. (2012). *100: Proposed Resolution and Report*. Retrieved from: <http://www.abanow.org/2012/06/2012am100/>