



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY**  
OF THE UNITED STATES

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February 20, 2013

Planning and Development Committee  
Room 2100, Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, CT 06106  
Phone: 860-240-0550

Dear Co-Chair Cassano, Co-Chair Rojas, and Honorable Members of the Planning and Development Committee,

On behalf of the Connecticut supporters of The Humane Society of the United States, I submit this letter in **SUPPORT of HB 6311**, which would prohibit municipalities from adopting breed-specific dangerous dog ordinances.

The HSUS opposes laws and ordinances aimed at forbidding or regulating dog ownership based solely on breed or type of dog. Breed-specific legislation (BSL) does not enhance public safety or reduce dog bite incidents. Rather, such laws, regulations, and ordinances are costly to enforce and harm families, dogs, and communities.

The HSUS supports finding real and effective strategies for safe, humane community dog management and believes BSL is a distraction from that goal—it wastes valuable resources and charges a moral cost in the process.

Most breed-specific laws are created as a misguided response to a dog bite incident or attack. There are a number of reasons BSL does not protect citizens from dog bites, including:

- **There is no credible evidence** to demonstrate that any particular breed or type is overrepresented among biting dogs. Professional animal expert organizations, including the American Veterinary Medical Association, have found that no breed is more dangerous than another.

- **Identifying breeds is often subjective and unreliable.** For example, the term “pit bull” usually encompasses three separate breeds, along with any mixes of those breeds. Any medium-sized dog with short hair and a squarish muzzle could meet most people’s visual perception of a “pit bull” dog—including hound mixes, retriever mixes, and other dogs with no “pit bull” ancestry. Clearly, the larger the dog, the greater the potential damage if he or she bites, but no one breed or type is more genetically programmed to bite than others.

- **BSL is nearly impossible to enforce.** It often ends up being created as a reactionary measure to a bite incident that ignores the true scope of the problem. As a result, there’s no scientific data that proves breed-specific measures have ever been effective at eliminating dog bites.

- **Underfunded animal-control agencies bear the brunt of the burden,** as BSL creates unrealistic mandates that take dogs out of homes and into shelters. These

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shelters then must endure the burden of housing—and often euthanizing—family dogs who posed no bite risk.

### Understanding the real risk factors

Though breed or type don't affect a dog's behavior, there are a variety of other factors and influences that do, including:

- **The dog's hormones.** Dogs who have not been neutered are more likely to bite than dogs that have.
- **The dog's quality of life.** Dogs who spend their lives isolated or chained may bite out of frustration or fear. Those are determinations that must be made by owners to prevent their dogs from biting.
- **The dog's upbringing.** Dogs raised by owners who understand and manage their behaviors and provide veterinary care may avoid painful or uncomfortable conditions that can cause overreactions to being handled.
- **The dog's personality.** Like people, some dogs are more easy-going than others, while others don't adjust well to new situations. No two dogs will ever react exactly the same way to a given circumstance.
- **The person's ability to recognize warning signs.** Dogs who bite usually give some kind of warning, whether subtle or overt. If people ignore or misunderstand such warnings, dogs may feel the need or urge to bite.

### Developing a proactive solution

Our society coexists with almost 80 million dogs—living in 40% of American households—so it's vital that communities have preventative, effective dog-bite solutions that are backed by stakeholders and lawmakers. Such solutions involve understanding the real risk factors for bites, helping minimize those risk factors, and ensuring that bites are handled effectively and uniformly to eliminate future risk.

Dog bite incidents will decline when all dog owners are given access to critical services such as veterinary care, spaying and neutering resources, training and behavior assistance, and other socialization and health information. Proactive strategies aimed at preventing bites from happening in the first place—paired with appropriate enforcement-based responses to bite incidents—create a safer, more humane approach to managing dogs in communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours truly,



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