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**STATEMENT TO THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
SUPPORTING**

Proposed Bill No. 6311

Dear Senator Cassano, Representative Rojas, Vice-Chairs, Ranking Members and Members:

I am a psychotherapist in Connecticut and would like to be present to speak to you today but am unable due to my work schedule. I am licensed in CT and also NY and am nationally board certified. I am also the guardian (owner) of an American Pit bull Terrier (APBT).

Pit bull is not a breed but a catch phrase for three breeds: American Pit Bull Terrier, the American Staffordshire Terrier, the Staffordshire Bull Terrier. These three breeds are often the dogs most singled out by Breed Specific Legislation.

Breed Specific Legislation (BSL) has proven to not work. It is an emotional reaction to a *human*, not canine, situation. Unfortunately, pit bulls are the most abused and euthanized dog in America today. We have placed prejudicial notions onto pit bulls when, in fact, the responsibility should be placed on irresponsible owners. Over and over again, pit bulls are abused, tortured and murdered, due to the actions of humans. It has to stop.

The majority of pit bull owners are responsible, educated, citizens. Pit bulls were once revered nanny dogs, which were glorified during WWI and WWII. At least three United States Presidents have owned pit bulls. Pit Bulls are no more vicious than Golden Retrievers, Beagles or other popular dogs. In a recent study of 122 dog breeds by the American Temperament Testing Society (ATTS), Pit Bulls achieved a passing rate of 83.9%. That is better than Beagles at 78.2% and Golden Retrievers at 83.2%.

Another misnomer is that pit bulls have locking jaws. Pit Bulls cannot lock their jaws. If one reviews x-rays of a Chihuahua and compare it to that of a Pit Bull, you will see that

they are both the same except for the size difference. Other breeds of dogs have a stronger pound for pound pressure bite, yet it is the pit bull that is vilified.

Facts

BSL does not reduce dog bites.

The United Kingdom's Dangerous Dog Act bans the American Pit Bull Terrier and three other breeds of dogs and their crossbreeds. Yet reports from the U.K. indicate that dog bites requiring hospital treatment have not decreased. Rather, 4,328 dog bites were reported treated by U.K. hospitals in 1999, whereas in the year ending April 2011 there were 6,118 such treatments—an increase of 41% over ten years [HES data]. The U.K. also continues to experience approximately four dog bite fatalities per year.

In June 2008, the Netherlands passed the repeal of their 15-year-long ban on pit bulls due to its failure to ensure public safety. Dog bites continued to rise in spite of the ban. The government is now looking into behavior-based, rather than breed-based, legislation.

Spain passed the Dangerous Animals Act in 2000, placing restrictions on nine breeds of dogs and dogs possessing "characteristics" of those breeds. A scientific study analyzing dog bites reported to the Aragon health department during a five year period before the Act was passed (1995 to 1999) and the five year period after passage (2000 to 2004) found that there was no significant difference in the number of dog bites in Spain before or after the Dangerous Animals Act passed.

Furthermore, the study found that the most popular breeds (none of which were targeted by the legislation) were responsible for the most bites both before and after passage of the BSL. The targeted breeds accounted for a very small portion of bites both before and after passage of the BSL. The scientists concluded that there was no rational basis for Spain's BSL.

BSL is costly.

In 2001, a Baltimore, Maryland, auditor estimated it would cost \$750,000 to enforce a breed-specific ban.

In 2008, Omaha proposed BSL that would cost over half a million dollars to enforce.

The United Kingdom's Dangerous Dog Act, which includes a ban on certain breeds of dogs, is estimated to have cost well over \$14 million to enforce between the years 1991 and 1996 (no more recent numbers are available). It has come under fire lately as dog bites (committed by non-targeted dogs) rise despite the ban.

Even small cities and communities can spend tens of thousands of dollars annually to uphold their BSL.

As if administrative costs are not enough of a burden, lawsuits are par for the course when BSL is passed. Lawsuits are filed because:

- Owners of targeted breeds feel that BSL violates the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution
- Dog owners dispute the breed designation that an animal control officer or shelter worker has placed on their dog
- A municipality's breed-specific legislation contradicts state law
- Breed-specific legislation violates the federal Americans with Disabilities Act

Lawsuits can cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars and place a heavy burden on both the court system and animal control departments. Often, these lawsuits are brought about by responsible dog owners whose family dogs were confiscated simply because of their appearance, not their behavior. Such lawsuits further underline the high cost and senselessness of BSL.

There is difficulty with identifying breeds.

Seventy-five percent or more of the U.S. canine population without any sort of traceable lineage. Some of these dogs are undoubtedly purebred, though they may lack any sort of historical paper trail to prove it. Their appearance is close enough to a breed standard that owners can confidently say that their dog is of a specific breed.

The vast majority of canines, however, are mixed breed dogs. And though we tend to think of mixed breed dogs as the offspring of two purebred dogs (Mastiff x Boxer = Mastiff-Boxer mix), the reality is far more complex. Most mixed breed dogs are a genetic mishmash resulting from several generations of mixed breed dogs interbreeding. The end result is incredibly complex.

To make things more confusing, a dog that doesn't really meet any single breed standard may be categorized as a type of dog rather than a specific breed. Dogs may be identified as terriers, pit bulls, shepherds, or retrievers; none of these are actual breed names, and the breeds that really do make up these categories come in a startling variety of shapes, sizes, and colors. There's a huge difference between an Airedale Terrier and a Jack Russell Terrier, so what does a "terrier mix" describe?

BSL targets breeds, not behaviors. Responsible, trained, family dogs are targeted as being "dangerous" just because they are alive. Behavior is not taken into consideration. Families, who license their dogs, train them, exercise them, abide by all laws are punished for owning a dog that is or appears to be of a certain breed. This breedism is a direct correlation to racism. It is no different than making African-American's slaves because of the color of their skin. Certain dogs would be deemed "dangerous" purely based on appearance. Does Connecticut want to be known as the breedist state?

Massachusetts passed Massachusetts S.219. It states, "No city or town shall regulate in a manner specific to breed." Connecticut must follow suit! BSL is not the answer to any dog problem. *We must hold our municipalities responsible for their lack of enforcement of responsible ownership laws which already exist!*

Banning breeds creates a host of problems. For example:

1. The United Kingdom has BSL. In 2012 the Belfast City Council sentenced a dog named, Lennox, to death. He was a service dog to a disabled child. He was proven not to be "of breed" by DNA tests. He was murdered anyway because government officials, without any knowledge of dogs decided to murder him. There was a massive outcry around the world against this. I don't think Connecticut wishes to be the focus of such scrutiny in the future, or viewed as such a vile place to live.
2. Animal advocates around the globe focus attention through the media, and social networking on towns, cities and states that have BSL. Officials are constantly barraged with negative public attention.

Alternatives to BSL are containment laws, abuse prevention, safety education, spay and neuter assistance, breeder regulation, low cost training, and stiffer penalties for dog fighters, those who attend dog fights, and animal abuse.

BSL is a costly draconian idea that serves no purpose. It punishes responsible dogs and owners. If BSL was ever passed in my city or state, I would move, even if it meant walking away from my property. Many pit bull owners feel the same way. Not only does BSL cost tax payer dollars to implement, but the tax base to the city and state is lost when people move out due to breed specific legislation.

I fully support Proposed Bill No. 6311. We are smart enough to think of more humane, compassionate ways to treat our state's family pets.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lisa Taylor-Austin

Sources:

The Pit bull Placebo, Delise K., 2007, Anubis Publishing.
Interesting Facts about BSL
Public Service Announcement, <http://vimeo.com/53622294>
www.stopbsl.org

Interesting Facts About BSL

Think only "those" dogs bite?

There is a misconception that BSL consistently targets the type or breed of dog most responsible for bites.

Redding, California bite statistics for 2006

- Number one biter: Labrador Retriever (22 bites)
- Number one breed causing major wounds: Blue Heeler (8 major bites, 11 total bites)
- Pit bull statistics: 13 bites total; 9 minor, 4 major
- Jack Russell Terrier: 12 bites total; 9 minor, 3 major

New South Wales bite statistics for 2006

- Top three biting breeds: German Shepherds, Cattle dogs, Rottweilers

In Iowa

For three years in a row, Labrador Retrievers have topped the bite list

Victoria, Australia

Between 1997-1999, 700 attacks were reported. Forty-six breeds were identified.

- German Shepherd: 127 attacks
- Cattle dog: 90 attacks

Rottweilers, Kelpies, Labrador Retrievers, Staffordshire Bull Terriers, Bull Terriers, Crossbreeds, Dobermans, Boxers, Jack Russell Terriers, and Rhodesian Ridgebacks bit more frequently than the American Pit Bull Terrier (21 bites).

Does BSL work?

The basic premise behind BSL is that it will reduce the rate and frequency of dog bites inflicted on humans (based on the assumption that certain types of dogs are more dangerous and bite more frequently than other breeds of dogs).

In April of 2007, Middletown lifted its two year ban of pit bulls.

Pit Bulls accounted for 5% of bites...the same percentage of bites before and now after the ban. From April 2007 - October 2007, pit bulls have only bitten twice.

UK Study

In the UK, four breeds of dogs are banned (including the American Pit Bull Terrier

Number of bites BEFORE the breed ban: 99 in a three-month period.

Percentage of bites by pit bulls BEFORE the breed ban: 3%

Number of bites 2 years AFTER the breed ban: 99 in a three-month period.

Percentage of bites by pit bulls AFTER the breed ban: 5%

In this case, the number of bites did not decrease after the breed ban AND the number of bites by a prohibited breed increased.

In June of 2007, the number of hospitalizations from dog bites has doubled since the implementation of the 1991 Dangerous Dog Act.

Another premise of BSL is that there IS a "dangerous breed" problem, i.e. certain types of dogs bite more and should be regulated. Traditionally, pit bulls and Rottweilers have been targeted.

In another UK study

Percentage of bites by THREE breeds (American Pit Bull Terrier, Rottweiler, Doberman) BEFORE BSL: 6%

Percentage of bites by German Shepherd BEFORE BSL: 24% German Shepherds are not banned.

In Winnipeg

1989: 31% of dog bites committed by German Shepherds and their crosses; only 9% committed by pit bulls and their mixes. Pit bulls banned.

Denver, Colorado

Pit bulls have, for the most part, been banned for nearly 20 years. When asked if the ban has been effective, Denver director of animal control, Doug Kelley, "People ask me a whole bunch whether the pit bull ordinance is effective and my answer is, I don't know."

Edmonton, Canada

- Since a 1997 implementation of breed restriction, 4 breeds have the same bite rate as pit bulls and 11 breeds exceed the number of bites inflicted by pit bulls.

Kitchener/Waterloo

- Number of pit bull bites: 18. Number of German Shepherd bites: 85 - Pit bulls banned.

Perth County, Ontario

- Dog bite statistics compiled since January 2002 show just 1% of bites attributed to 'pit bulls'. One third of reported bites were caused by mixed breed dogs, and the top five biting breeds were: Chow Chow, Jack Russell Terrier, Labrador Retriever, Dachshund, and Rottweiler.

Ottawa, Ontario

Of the nearly 900 reports of bite incidents in Ottawa, Ontario for the last three years, only five were attributable to pit bulls. The largest number of bite incidents involved Black Labrador Retrievers and Golden Retrievers.

Is BSL good for taxpayers?

The cost of enforcing breed specific legislation is often high, especially since resources are wasted on calls from "concerned neighbors" regarding possible banned breed presence.

London, Ontario

The province of Ontario banned pit bulls in 2005

- Percentage of licensed pit bulls: 4%
- Percentage of time (and money) animal control spends on pit bull related calls: 25%
- Percent of money spent on enforcing ban: 10% or \$170,000 per year.

Windsor, Canada

- An extra \$26,000 each year is spent on enforcing a pit bull ban

United Kingdom's Dangerous Dog Act of 1991

- Cost for IDENTIFYING pit bulls: \$14 million - Yearly costs in litigation: \$10 million

Cincinnati, Ohio

- During a 10-year period, the city spent \$160,000 per year trying to enforce a pit bull ban

But, wait; aren't pit bulls statistically more likely to kill compared to their population size?

According to registries (UKC, AKC, ADBA), there are approximately 5 million pit bulls in the United States. The CDC study reported 60 fatalities attributed to "pit bull type dogs" - statistically, that is 0.0012% of the breed population (.000009% of the total dog population). Chows, according to the CDC report killed 12 people - statistically the fatality rate of Chows is .705% of the breed population.

Are there effective alternatives?

In Calgary, CA there is no breed ban. Instead of creating more laws, existing leash laws and licensing requirements were more stringently enforced. An effective education outreach campaign was initiated. Dog bites dropped 70% and the number of dogs licensed now stands at 90%. That's huge! As a comparison, most license rates are below 20% in the United States.

