

Testimony Concerning House Bill 5361
Insurance and Real Estate Committee, February 10, 2015
Dr. Erica Giles DVM

I would like to thank the Insurance and Real Estate Committee for the opportunity to express my support of House Bill 5361, An Act Concerning the use of the breed of dog as an underwriting factor for homeowners and tenants insurance policies.

As a veterinarian and animal advocate, I am reaching out to you today to help end an injustice and prejudice that's gone on far too long. I've had the pleasure of working with numerous and owning several "dangerous breeds" throughout my career and lifetime and can't express enough how unjustified I believe these laws to be. The "pit bulls", rottweilers, dobermans, shepards and other large breeds have been unfairly discriminated against because of the proportionately few individuals out there that have been aggressive and dangerous. I think the key behind this issue is that the focus needs to be on the individual dog and not on a stereotype. The individual dog's predisposition to injuring someone is more associated with dog training and owner education than it is breed. Because of this, I believe it is unfair to punish the responsible owners, such as myself, that have happened to fall in love with these breeds for their wonderful loving personality and great family nature.

The first "pitbull" I had was really the one who stole my heart and made me the huge advocate I am today. He was intact when we adopted him and had very little training. Both things that were risk factors for undesirable behaviors. We had him neutered and from the time he entered the house he was the most amazing, forgiving dog I had ever come in contact with. The other dogs took toys from his mouth, food from his bowl without so much as a snarl. Toddlers climbed on him, pulled on his tail and his only retaliation was licking them until their faces were drenched. He happily greeted every person who came to the house. All the while he was a pitbull, with an uncertain past, no training and not an aggressive bone in his body.

The current "pitbull" I own gets constantly bossed around by my cats and miniature dachshund and greets everyone that enters my house with kisses and tail wags, regardless if it's someone she's met or a perfect stranger. This friendly personality is the same regardless of gender, age and race. We frequent dog parks where she constantly interacts with new people and dogs, and has been going to doggie daycare since I adopted her at a year of age. This reinforces the fact that breed alone does not predispose a dog to aggression, as I was not the person who socialized her as a puppy and I knew little of her upbringing when I adopted her. She's been nothing but friendly and outgoing.

Despite these stories and countless others; despite all the wonderful dogs I work with on a daily basis that fight their breed's stereotypes; the ignorance and prejudice persists. The current laws that are in place only impact the responsible owners and great dogs. As they stand, they do little to protect against the dogs that the laws were created for. Passing this bill and others like it, will be the first step in demolishing this injustice. Passing this bill will allow people like me,

who are responsible owners, keep their beloved companions without fear of policy discrimination and help us bring an end to the prejudice.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to testify and I do hope you will strongly support this important piece of legislation.

Thank you,
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