The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) is concerned about the propensity of various communities’ reliance on breed-specific legislation as a tool to decrease the risk and incidence of dog bites to humans. Breed-specific legislation (BSL)—often called breed-certain legislation—mimics dominance theory and has assumed that animals showing undesirable behaviors are due to accidental or stressful situations. Consequently, what is often suggested is that breed-specific legislation is an over-simplification of animal psychology and is ineffective, and can lead to a false sense of community safety as well as welfare concerns for dogs identified (often incorrectly) as belonging to specific breeds. The importance of the reduction of dog bites is critical, however, the AVSAB now views that matching pet dogs to appropriate households, adequate early socialization and appropriate training, and owner and community education are the most effective in preventing dog bites. Therefore, the AVSAB does not support the legislation regarding dangerous dogs, provided that it is education based and not breed specific.

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more dangerous than breeds considered to be friendly.

The lack of evidence is not predictive of the risk of aggressive behavior. Dogs and owners must be educated individually.

**Breed Misidentification**

The AVMA reported in 2012 that approximately 46% of dogs in the U.S. were mixed breeds. 20 AVMA termed “bully breeds,” (such as the American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, etc.) most dogs referred to as “pit bulls” are merely individuals with a common general phenotype (or appearance). Thus, an additional concern regarding BSL involves accurately identifying breeds or traits that prevent state or local governments from enacting BSL. Taxonomy is not reliable. Presumed breed identification is often made by neighbors, public officials, law enforcement, reporters, etc.—not necessarily by people who work with animals—even those professionals may not know.

Dog DNA testing has proven what Scott and Fuller first demonstrated in 1945—that mixed breed dogs might not look like other dog parent. In a classic experiment breeding Beagles with English Cocker Spansis, not all the first or second generation offspring resembled either of the pure-bred parents. 21 In fact, those offspring were often identified by “exper- terts” as altogether different breeds, such as Basenjis with English Cocker or Manchester Terriers with Golden Retriever mixes.

A study published in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association indicated that 90% of residents could not identify the breeds accurately. Under BSL, dogs that resemble pit bulls but not mixed breeds are infrequently confiscated and euthanized by authorities if they have never exhibited aggression. Since most dogs are mixed breeds and inaccurate reporting of alleged breeds has such great repercussions, it is now recommend- ed that veterinarians and shelters refrain from trying to identify breed mixes visually. 9

Also, if the canine genome appears to be responsible for the great physical variation among dogs, how is it further complicated by genetics that is in fact unique for dog breeds? 9

**What Do Dogs Bite?**

Aggression is a context-dependent behavior and is associated with many different motivations (i.e., defensive, learned, fearful or predatory). Most dogs that show aggression do so to eliminate a perceived threat, either to their safety or to the possession of a resource. They may show aggression toward people because they are perceived as a threat, or toward other animals with which they have been socialized, or toward resources such as food or toys. Aggression is a serious problem, and public officials regarding responsibil- ity, ownership, and control, and reducing dog attacks on people. 7 The Task Force concluded that “responsible ownership is the key to reducing canine aggression.” 7 Implementing an education program, the state of Nevada was able to reduce the incidence of dog bites by approximately 15%. 35

The city of Calgary (Alberta, Canada) has a “Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw” requirement for pet licensing, and still fines are levied for bylaw infractions. 36 As a result, approximately 40% of dog owners were lost as of 2010 for non-numbering most cities in North America. 35,37 Does your city have a license and permit system for both dogs and their owners? The AVMA Guidelines for Responsible Pet Ownership include licensing, training, socializing, spaying/neutering, and providing appropriate homes and veterinary care for pets. 6 In Chicago, a Task Force on Companion Animals and Public Safety was devised to guide public officials regarding responsibil- ity, ownership, and control, and reducing dog attacks on people. 7 The Task Force concluded that “responsible ownership is the key to reducing canine aggression.” 7 Implementing an education program.

**Reducing the Incidence of Aggression**

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**What Do Dogs Bite?**

Aggression is a context-dependent behavior and is associated with many different motivations. Most dogs that show aggression do so to eliminate a perceived threat, either to their safety or to the possession of a resource. Other aggression is fear-based. Why Do Dogs Bite?

**Reasonable dog ownership and public education must be a primary focus of any dog bite prevention policy.** 31

**What Works? Effective Ways to Reduce the Incidence of Aggression**

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