



Facts and Fiction about “Pit Bulls” and Breed Specific Legislation

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1. At the time of the passage of Ontario’s breed specific legislation there were fewer than 200 Staffordshire Terriers (purebreds covered under the act) in Ontario.
2. Most “pit bulls” are actually cross breeds. Michael Bryant, the Attorney General who introduced the Bill, couldn’t pick a pure bred pit bull out of a lineup of cross breeds.
3. The BSL legislation describes a dog using words like “broad forehead,” “short hair,” “broad shoulders” and “long tail” – all of which could describe lots of dogs. I said at one point that it would also describe most male politicians, except for the long tail, and since most male politicians wear pants, who knows?
4. No Humane Society or Veterinarian Association supports breed specific legislation.
5. The Toronto Humane Society did a five-year study proving that the legislation has not made Ontario any safer.
6. The only studies that show a change show only that by banning dogs that look a certain way, dogs that look a certain way are less likely to bite because there are fewer dogs that look that certain way.
7. Cesar Milan, arguably the most famous dog trainer, uses “pit bulls” as his examples of well trained dogs and has spoken about our seeming need to demonize certain breeds – first German Shepherds, then Dobermans, then Rottweilers, now “pit bulls.” When Cesar comes to Ontario he has to leave his dogs behind.

8. Earlier last century, “pit bulls” were used as nanny dogs to watch children when parents were unavailable.
9. The Westminster Dog Show has categories for American Pit Bull and Staffordshire (show dogs that would not be allowed in Ontario).
10. Almost all jurisdictions that have lived with breed specific legislation eventually abandon it as ineffective in adding to public safety.
11. Breed specific legislation has led to the euthanizing of at least 1,000 dogs in Ontario. Dogs were killed simply because of the way they looked, not for any act. Most were family pets.
12. Often the law is used as a “grudge” weapon in neighbour-against-neighbour spats, and authorities can remove dogs from yards without the owners being home or even knowing where their dog has gone.
13. Targeted dogs and their owners have to prove the dog in question is **not** a “pit bull,” and have to pay for every day the dog is in custody.
14. Locking jaws on “pit bulls” is a myth, with no basis in reality.
15. Fatal dog bites are as rare as fatal lightning strikes. When dog attacks do happen, it is more likely to be a breed other than a “pit bull.”
16. Experts agree that human behaviour is the single most likely cause of dog bites and that education in children, training for dog owners and hefty fines and liability for negligent dog owners are far more effective tools to curbing dog bites than breed specific legislation – the Calgary model is a good one to look at in Canada.*
17. We humans love to fear animals (Jaws, Cujo) and, every time, the fear is shown to be disproportional to any real threat. The most dangerous animal on earth is in fact, the human. Perhaps our fear has more to do with deflection from real threats? Perhaps it has to do with our guilt over the way in which we have treated animals on this planet?
18. Over 800,000 signatures have been delivered to Queen’s Park calling for the rescinding of breed specific legislation.
19. Two Bills have been tabled calling for the elimination of breed specific legislation. The last one, Bill 16, passed second reading and committee hearings and was supported by members of all three political parties at Queen’s Park, but the Wynne government refuses to bring it back for third

and final reading.

20. Negligent and cruel owners who train their dogs to attack and fight simply move from one breed to another as laws like BSL are passed. Isn't it time we passed laws that dealt with those owners more severely rather than their victimized dogs?

Cheri DiNovo is an NDP MPP and a United Church of Canada minister. She has been active in the fight to overturn Ontario's breed specific legislation and spoke earlier this year at a rally at Queens Park as part of a worldwide observation to end BSL.

* **Editor's note:** In Calgary, dog attacks have fallen to their lowest level in 25 years despite the absence of breed specific legislation. While the population of the city has doubled, Calgary has cut dog bites and chases by more than 75% by focusing on the root causes of problems. Initiatives focus on providing support rather than punishing citizens into compliance. Calgary sought buy-in and cooperation from community stakeholders, introduced an extensive education and PR campaign to encourage responsible pet ownership, charges low license fees and modest differential fees for intact pets, and enforces anti-tethering laws.