



Comanche County Pet Resource Foundation

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Lawton City Council:

On behalf of the Comanche County Pet Resource Foundation, I am writing to provide information concerning recent discussions by the Lawton City Council and Lawton Animal Welfare on proposed legislation regarding vicious dogs. The Comanche County Pet Resource Foundation opposes any measure that includes breed-specific restrictions or bans on pit bull terriers, or any other breed, as a measure to combat dangerous dogs and dog attacks. Such measures are ineffective and detract much-needed attention from real solutions that can make a difference in protecting our community.

As I know you are aware, the issue of dangerous dogs, dog bites and public safety is a complex one. There are no easy answers. While breed-specific restrictions might seem to make sense, there is no credible evidence to indicate they are effective – and no reliable data to support the idea that any specific dog breeds are more dangerous than others. In fact, breed-specific data on dog bites and attacks is often inconsistent or incomplete and therefore of little or no use in guiding community policy. This is because:

- The breed of a biting dog is often not known or is reported inaccurately.
- The actual number of bites that occur in a community is not known, especially if they don't result in serious injury.
- The number of dogs of a particular breed or combination of breeds in a community is not known because it is rare for all dogs in a community to be licensed.
- Statistics often do not consider multiple incidents caused by a single animal.
- Breed popularity changes over time, making comparison of breed-specific bite rates unreliable.

Communities around the country that have implemented breed-specific ordinances have had little success. In Denver, for example, a ban on pit bull terriers drove people with banned dogs to move their animals into other jurisdictions where the dogs were not banned. This, of course, didn't solve any problem. Meanwhile, the legislation resulted in the euthanization of more than 1,000 dogs, regardless of whether they were involved in attacks on people.

Breed-specific ordinances raise several practical issues, as well, including the difficulty in determining the breed of a particular dog and the possibility of violating owners' constitutional rights. Study data show that even people very familiar with dog breeds cannot reliably determine the primary breed of a mutt. **Perhaps most importantly, breed bans do not address the underlying social issues of irresponsible pet ownership.**



Any dog can bite. Dogs are more likely to become aggressive when they are unsupervised, unneutered, tied up in yards and not socially conditioned to live closely with people or other dogs. While a breed ban looks good on the surface, it is really a simplistic response to a far more complex social problem. In fact, breed bans have the potential to put the citizens of Lawton at greater risk by giving them a false sense of security and deemphasizing to owners of other breeds the importance of responsible pet ownership.

Veterinarians, governmental leaders, non-profit organizations and citizens must work together to create a coordinated, multidisciplinary and adequately resourced approach to dog bite prevention. This should not be based on breed, but instead on promoting responsible pet ownership and developing methods to rapidly identify and respond to owners whose dogs present an actual risk to the community.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) recommends the following strategies:

- 1) Enforcement of generic, non-breed-specific dangerous dog laws, with an emphasis on chronically irresponsible owners
- 2) Enforcement of animal control ordinances such as leash laws, spay/neuter laws and breeding laws, by trained animal care and control officers
- 3) Prohibition of dog fighting
- 4) Encouraging the spaying neutering for dogs by providing more low-cost spay/neuter opportunities.
- 5) School-based and adult education programs that teach pet selection strategies, pet care and responsibility, and bite prevention

As animal welfare professionals, my colleagues and I play a key role in educating pet owners. But many dogs that bite may not have been assisted by any of our programs. Therefore, other venues must be created to reach the community. These should include public education, trained and empowered animal control officers, and a strategy for responding to uncooperative owners of animals that represent a danger to others.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this issue. The Comanche County Pet Resource Foundation would be happy to assist you with any additional information that you might need.

Sincerely,

Marcia Cronk

President, Comanche County Pet Resource Foundation