



March 15, 2019

MPP David Piccini
Constituency Office
117 Peter St.
Port Hope, ON L1A 1C5

Dear Mr. Piccini,

On behalf of the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA) and over 4,000 veterinarians in the Province of Ontario, I am pleased to write to you today in support of a repeal of breed specific language from the *Dog Owner's Liability Act* (DOLA) and the *Animals for Research Act*.

OVMA has been a strong advocate for legislation that ensures the public is adequately protected from dangerous dogs of any breed. However, OVMA does not support legislation that deems that a dog is dangerous based solely on its breed or appearance, regardless of whether it has demonstrated that it poses a threat to public safety. Since the *Dog Owners Liability Act* was amended in 2005, effectively banning pit bulls from the province, well over 1,000 dogs that had never harmed an animal or person or exhibited any threatening behavior have been euthanized in Ontario. The needless destruction of these dogs represents a serious animal welfare issue and runs counter to the wishes of Ontarians.¹

Veterinarians, by their nature and training, take an evidence-based approach to any issue, including aggressive behaviour in dogs. Based on an extensive review of available research on the subject, OVMA has concluded that Breed Specific Legislation (BSL) is not an effective method of reducing the number of dog bites in humans, and that it has resulted in significant negative consequences for both people and dogs in Ontario. Although such bans might comfort individuals who have had unpleasant experiences with particular breeds or who have heard of attacks by specific dog breeds in the media, a breed-specific ban does not effectively regulate dogs that should be considered dangerous, regardless of breed. While Ontario-wide statistics are not readily available, the number of reported dog bites in Toronto has risen in recent years, even though the number of pit bulls in Toronto has drastically decreased as a result of the ban. In fact, the pit bull ban was so ineffective in controlling dog bites in Toronto that the city was forced to enact a new municipal by-law in 2017 to address the dangerous dog issue.

As per the article *Community Approach to Dog Bite Prevention*, featured in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (2001), BSL implies that there is an objective method of determining the breed of a particular dog. However, current research shows that there is no accurate method to distinguish between breeds. Owners of mixed-breed dogs or dogs that have not been registered with a

¹ A 2016 Angus Reid Poll on the issue found that 63% of Ontario opposed banning specific dog breeds.

national kennel club have no way of knowing whether their dog is one of the types identified and whether they are required to comply with the legislation.

In addition, law enforcement personnel typically have no scientific means for determining a dog's breed that can withstand the rigours of legal challenge. This has led to bias amongst those enforcing this ban, again resulting in the unnecessary deaths of dogs which merely resembled a pit bull.

Research has clearly shown that a more effective approach to dealing with dangerous dogs would be to improve bite prevention education and implement non-breed-specific, dangerous dog laws which place the primary responsibility for a dog's behavior on the owner, regardless of the dog's breed. For example, the Province could increase the penalties available to the courts when a dog owner fails to act appropriately to safeguard the public from his or her dog. Working with veterinarians, breeders and other interested parties, the Province could also educate the public about how to choose a dog that is appropriate for their lifestyle, how to properly train their dog, and how to recognize aggressive behavior sooner, to aid in the prevention of potential attacks.

Such an approach would also benefit Ontario taxpayers, who have been burdened with the costs associated with enforcing the breed-specific ban. At a time when the Province is in a deficit position, the money spent on enforcement personnel and court proceedings trying to prove dogs are pit bulls could surely be better spent providing Ontarians with essential services.

In closing, it is clear that breed-specific legislation has not worked in Ontario. It has simply resulted in the unnecessary deaths of countless dogs that have never harmed anyone or anything. OVMA therefore urges the Province of Ontario to correct this injustice and repeal the breed-specific ban under the *Dog Owner's Liability Act* (DOLA) and the *Animals for Research Act*.

OVMA would like to thank you for recognizing the importance of this issue and for introducing this bill to begin the process of working toward repealing breed specific legislation. OVMA would also like to offer its assistance as a stakeholder group to continue to assist with policy development on this important issue. If you or your staff have any questions regarding our position please do not hesitate to contact OVMA's Manager of Government and External Relations, Brandi Deimling at bdeimling@ovma.org, or 1-800-670-1702, ext. 224.

Sincerely,



Dr. Sue Dorland
President