



January 30, 2019

Dear The Honourable Caroline Mulroney, Attorney General of Ontario

Nearly 14 years has gone by since the introduction of Ontario's breed specific legislation, I am writing to encourage you to revisit how the province approaches bite prevention. Banning specific breeds of dogs does not reduce the incidence or severity of dog bites; but it does penalize the people who are responsible pet owners and kill innocent, loving and friendly dogs.

Just recently we had a "pit bull" surrendered into our care named Beanz. When this situation arises, we immediately start a search for animal welfare organizations outside of Ontario who would be willing to take the dog. Sadly, this was not an easy task for Beanz since this young pup was in dire need of medical care and needed surgery prior to transferring him out of province. 8 month old Beanz touched the hearts of nearly everyone at the Toronto Humane Society. His energetic and happy-go-lucky spirit was infectious. Even though this youngster had many interested and suitable people who wanted to give him a home in Ontario, we had to transfer him out of province due to Ontario's Breed Specific Legislation. When the time came to say goodbye, there were many tears shed. This young man touched the lives of so many at the Toronto Humane Society that our staff put together a beautiful video of his goodbye.

Aside from the departure of well-behaved dogs, Ontario's pit bull ban is problematic for many reasons:

- The law punishes dogs for their appearance, instead of their behaviour. Aggression can result from many factors, including lack of training and socialization, lack of exercise and mental stimulation, poor breeding, mistreatment, health issues and failure to spay/neuter (which reduces aggression). However, appearance and breed are not factors causing aggression.
- It deprives owners of due process, with no objective method for establishing whether a mixed breed dog falls under the legislation's vague "pit bull" definition.
- As dogs are considered pit bulls unless proven otherwise, the law is open to abuse through false allegations. It unfairly penalizes low income individuals who cannot afford to retain a lawyer and where an accusation can mean the de facto death of their dog.
- Focussing on breeds gives the public a false sense of security – as individual dogs may be dangerous, regardless of breed – and punishes many dogs who are not dangerous.
- It is costly to enforce, both for municipalities (through sheltering and enforcement costs) and the province (through court cases).



Ontario does not have a dog bite database and thus has no reliable data to assess if breed specific legislation has improved public safety. Yet, even were there such a database, measuring bites by breed is meaningless. The Centres for Disease Control in the US noted that, not only is it virtually impossible to calculate bite rates for specific breeds, but dogs of any breed can become dangerous if they are raised to be aggressive; furthermore, individuals who exploit dogs simply turn to other breeds.

At the Toronto Humane Society, we work in partnership with people and communities to find creative solutions and improve outcomes for animals (like Beanz), in pursuit of our mission: to promote the humane care and protection of all animals and to prevent cruelty and suffering. We have seen first-hand that a community approach to responsible pet ownership – one that focuses on the behaviour of the dog and the person – is the best way to protect public safety and promote animal welfare.

We ask you and your fellow Ministers to:

- Repeal the breed-specific elements of the Dog Owner's Liability Act and Animals for Research Act
- Prohibit municipalities from enacting breed-specific by-laws
- Develop protocols to deal with dogs who have been professionally assessed as dangerous
- Promote responsible pet ownership, including incorporating bite awareness programs in Ontario's elementary curriculum
- Work with municipalities to encourage pet licensing and give owners incentives to spay/neuter and identify their dogs

We would be happy to work with you to develop more effective legislation that addresses the core issues behind dog bites and makes Ontario safer for both people and dogs.

Yours truly,

Jacques Messier, DVM, MBA
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Sylvia Jones, Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services
Mr. David Puccini, M.P.P.