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## OPINION MY WORD

# Legislate aggressive behavior, not breeds

Dr. Wes Borgman

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Since the 1980s, breed-specific legislation or aggressive-dog laws have been working their way across the United States and Canada. Touted by many to be the answer to vicious dog attacks, the initiatives are more frequently seen in state legislatures, city council meetings, and small town agendas.

According to the Web site, [animallaw.info](http://animallaw.info), the majority of these laws focus on dogs that some consider to be "dangerous" breeds. These include pit bull terriers, German shepherds, chow chows, Rottweilers and Doberman pinschers.

The list, however, is growing and often includes mixed-breed dogs that show characteristics of these breeds. Thirty-seven states have enacted laws or have legislation in the works at some level of government. The current trend for enacting breed-specific legislation began two decades ago after a series of attacks left several people dead and many more injured. Locally, such discussion was renewed in late July after two pit bulls attacked an elderly man who later died.

Opponents of breed-specific regulations will often use the definition of the law as one of their main arguments against it. The laws are aimed more at restricting certain breeds than addressing the specific behavior of individual animals. Other points opponents make include the difficulty and often arbitrary nature of actual enforcement of the laws, an overloaded court system and the misidentification of animals. The American Kennel Club's Position Statement says the AKC will support dangerous dog control that is nondiscriminatory and is enforceable ([akc.org](http://akc.org)).

Even with some municipalities taking the plunge to prohibit certain breeds, some states are putting their foot down to stop reactionary legislation. According to Colorado's state laws, no municipality may enact a law that is restrictive based on breed alone.

Recently, four such laws were stopped because of public outcry or cost ineffectiveness in Colorado, Massachusetts and Oklahoma. However, California has recently repealed a ban on the initiatives, allowing cities to adopt ordinances banning or restricting certain breeds. Because of breed misconceptions and stereotypes, some pets are considered to be less dangerous than others simply because of their breed makeup.

All of the national dog clubs and the American Veterinary Medical Association have position statements denouncing the need or wisdom of such knee-jerk, breed-specific laws.

It is important that dog owners of any breed, or mixed breed, pay attention to laws that may affect their right and ability to keep their dog.

Stronger aggressive-dog laws that are not breed specific will do a better job of helping stop the terror of dog attacks.

For information, go to [wesborgman.com](http://wesborgman.com) and watch the video detailing dangerous dogs laws.

*Dr. Wes Borgman is a veterinarian who practices in Kissimmee and Sanford.*

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