

FOR IMMEDIATE USE

ALL BARK, NO BITE, COSTS IN THE MILLIONS

New research exposes high taxpayer cost to ban pit bulls

Breed-discriminatory legislation that targets pit bull-type dogs is an expensive waste of tax dollars, according to an economic study commissioned by Best Friends Animal Society. The Utah-based national animal welfare organization has worked with American pit bull terriers for many years and in the past two years has been working to rehabilitate dogs from the Michael Vick dog fighting case.

The study, completed by John Dunham and Associates and based on data from a variety of sources including the Federal government, serves as core information for a new online “Fiscal Impact Calculator” that Best Friends says will help state and local governmental entities calculate the true cost of implementing and enforcing breed-discriminatory laws. Such laws exist in approximately 300 different U.S. communities and involve regulating or banning certain breeds of dogs based solely on their lineage with no regard to the animal’s behavior or temperament.

Bottom line finding: It would cost governmental entities in excess of \$450 million to enforce a nationwide ban on pit bulls, which would include costs of enforcement, kenneling and veterinary care, euthanizing and disposal, litigation and DNA testing.

Among the other key findings of the study: There are approximately 72.1 million dogs in the United States, of which approximately five million (6.9 percent) can be described as pit bulls or pit bull mixes based solely on their appearance.

“Pit bull bans are enormously expensive and ineffective,” said Ledy VanKavage, an attorney with Utah-based Best Friends. “And if breed discriminatory ordinances are passed, people who love their pets will fight the government’s arbitrary identification of their dog, making them even more difficult to enforce.

“Many people view this as a property rights issue—‘as long as I’m a responsible dog owner, I should be allowed to have whatever breed of dog I choose.’ The key here is being responsible. Reckless or negligent owners should be prevented from owning any breed of dog.”

The [online calculator](http://www.guerrillaeconomics.biz/bestfriends/), designed for city, county and other governmental entities, allows anyone to estimate by state, county or town the costs for implementing and enforcing a breed-specific law. (<http://www.guerrillaeconomics.biz/bestfriends/>)

“It’s a model that is based on specific factors within communities,” said John Dunham, who led the study. “We realize that most communities don’t have this type of law in place, but our methodology is based on what would be needed within that community if such a law did exist. Our analysis shows that many communities that try to enforce this type of law really don’t have the infrastructure or resources to make it work.”

Dunham noted what he called “an amazing paucity of real data on pets in general” in the United States, which is one of the reasons for the study, funded by the National Canine Research Council. In some cities, such as Denver, animal control authorities can take a family’s dog away because it is a pit bull or just resembles a pit bull. Pit bulls usually include the pure breeds such as the American pit

bull terrier, the American Staffordshire terrier, or the Staffordshire bull terrier, but there are many mixed breed dogs that share lineage of the above-named pure breeds, along many short-haired muscular dogs that are confused for pit bulls.

"If you take someone's property away," VanKavage said, "the burden of proof is on the government to prove that the pet is subject to the law, which means you must prove it is a pit bull. That becomes an extensive, costly battle that could require DNA testing to see if the dog actually is subject to the ban."

The study goes on to say that breed discriminatory legislation tends to exhaust limited resources in already under-funded animal control programs by flooding the system with potentially "unadoptable" dogs due to the ban. Costs to regulate or ban the animals can run into the millions and provide no help to prevent dog bites.

Key Quotes from the Study

- "Breed discriminatory legislation, essentially canine racial profiling, is a misguided attempt to reduce fatalities and injuries caused by dogs. Identification of the breed makeup of a dog is highly imprecise due to the processes currently being used. DNA tests are available to identify breeds of dogs, but these are limited to the dogs that have been catalogued. For those not catalogued, there is no way other than through experience and observation of physical traits and characteristics to determine the breed of a dog."
- "The nature of this method of identification allows for the possibility for error by allowing legally permitted dogs to be captured and euthanized solely based on a person's opinion on the dog's breed make-up. In addition to the difficulty identifying breed make-up, regulation of specific breeds for the reduction of dog related injuries is inherently flawed since there is no proof that violent behavior is hereditary."
- "It can be argued, though, that a dog's tendency to bite could be affected by"
 - Socialization, or lack of, between the dog and people and other animals
 - Proper, or improper obedience training
 - Supervision and conditions of living for the dog
 - Victim's behavior
 - If the dog is spayed/neutered or unaltered ..."

The [Fiscal Impact calculator](#) and associated study is part of Best Friends Animal Society's nationwide campaign: "Pit Bulls: Saving America's Dog," which is part of the society's ongoing effort to restore the breed's reputation and encourage humane treatment of all dogs, regardless of breed. For more information on this campaign visit: savingamericasdog.com.

About Best Friends Animal Society:

Celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2009, Best Friends Animal Society advances nationwide animal welfare initiatives by working with shelter and rescue groups around the country. Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in southwestern Utah is the nation's largest facility for abused, abandoned and special needs companion animals. The society publishes *Best Friends* magazine, the nation's largest general interest, pet-related magazine with approximately 300,000 subscribers. For more information on Best Friends Animal Society, visit: <http://www.bestfriends.org/>

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