

Dear Mayor Gerlach and Esteemed Councilmembers,

I write to you as a fellow Kansan who cares deeply about the people, communities, and animals in Kansas. I understand that you are considering repealing the law banning certain breeds of dogs. I applaud the City Council for exploring this issue and I respectfully urge you to repeal Overland Park's dog breed ban.

I appreciate the seriousness of protecting public health and welfare and I believe that Overland Park would be best served by enacting a strong law against dangerous behavior in dogs to replace the current law that bans certain breeds. Every dog is an individual – with his own experiences and temperament. The most influential factor for dogs is how they are treated – if they have been offered kindness and good training, they have the best chance of being safe family pets. A breed of a dog does not determine their behavior – it's the people who raise that dog that will shape their nature. Many communities have taken this issue up of late and have worked with the ASPCA on appropriate and effective “dangerous dog” legislation based on a dog's behavior – and they have been repealing their old policies that were based on breed.

Specifically, Springfield, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas have recognized some unfortunate and unintended consequences of banning dog breeds and have overturned those laws. Dogs who are friendly and well-socialized could be killed simply because they look a certain way. Dog owners may be so afraid that their dog might be considered a “pit bull” that they will avoid taking their dog to the vet or to a trainer or for walks and exercise. This is tragic for the well-behaved dogs who are deprived good treatment actually harms public safety rather than enhancing it – we need all dogs to get proper veterinary care, vaccines, and exercise.

There is just no evidence that breed bans make communities safer for people or pets. In fact, they often compromise public safety, forcing animal control officers to collect more animals based only on appearance, while dangerous animals with histories of violence continue to roam free. Breed specific laws also deny citizens the right to determine the animal that best suits their needs. Treating dogs individually, providing them with the care, training and supervision they require and judging them by their behavior, not by their physical appearance is the most effective way to ensure that dogs and people can continue to share safe and happy lives together.

This view is backed by the American Veterinary Medical Association, American Bar Association, National Canine Research Council, Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. They have all determined that breed bans don't work. The CDC cites the difficulty in identifying dog breeds and the inaccuracy of breed-related dog bite data. The American Veterinary Medical Association says these bans are ineffectual and likely to divert attention and resources away from more effective strategies.

I hope that you will consider these expert views and concerns and repeal your law banning some dog breeds. Thank you for considering and for your work to preserve and protect your community.

God Bless America,

BOB DOLE