The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) is concerned about the propensity of various communities’ reliance on breed-specific legislation as a tool to decrease the risk and incidence of dog bites to humans. In this position statement, AVSAB’s recommendations are intended for public policy and law makers. AVSAB urges the following:

1. Certify dog bites are a significant public health hazard and educate the public about the dangers of dog bites.
2. Invest in reducing dog bites by educating the public about dog behavior and responsible pet ownership.
3. Enact public policies that direct public funding to education, health, and safety, and prevent breed-based legislation.
4. Implement a multi-pronged approach to dog bite prevention, including education, behavior modification programs, and state-regulated compulsory temperament testing.
5. Engage in a community approach to dog bite prevention.

Breed-specific legislation refers to public policies or legal statutes that control, limit or prevent ownership of specific dog breeds or mixes. Breeds listed as “dangers” in this type of legislation are often classified as having such characteristics or behaviors—often called breed-related legislation (BSL)—as ineffective, and can lead to a false sense of community safety as well as welfare concerns for dogs identified (often incorrectly) as belonging to specific breeds. The importance of the reduction of dog bites is critical, however the AVSAB view that matching pet dogs to appropriate households, adequate early socialization and appropriate training, and owner and community education are most effective in preventing dog bites. Therefore, the AVSAB does not support appropriate legislation regarding dangerous dogs, provided that it is education based and not breed specific.

**Facts About Dog Bites**

2009 estimates that 130,000 to 240,000 dog bites are reported in the U.S. each year, with an estimated 4.7 million dogs in America and estimated 56.7 million households with at least one dog. Dog bite data varies greatly; not all bites are reported, and those reported aren’t always documented into databases. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicated that between 2001-2003 there were over 1 million dog bites annually in the U.S. Of these bites, 5.8% involved children. Dog bite control is a priority to guard the resource. For instance, in a herd model, the dominant individual has the ability to influence their pets to perform certain behaviors owners want to modify, such as excessive barking.

**What is Breed-Specific Legislation?**

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**Calls for BSL**

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**Breed-Specific Legislation**

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more dangerous than breeds considered to be-friendly.

2. Breed identification is not predictive of the risk of aggressive behavior. Dogs and owners must be treated as individuals, with management based on their behavior, not breed, size or sex.

3. Breed-specific legislation can have unintended adverse effects. Owners of banned breeds may avoid veterinary visits and therefore vaccinations (including rabies) to elude seizure of the dog by authorities and/or euthanasia. This negatively impacts both the welfare of dogs and public health.

4. Responsible breeding and puppy-raising behaviors, irrespective of breed or mix. Appropriate socialization and training of puppies, which increases the risk of behavior problems including fear and aggression in adulthood.

5. Responsible breeding and puppy-raising behaviors for aggressive dogs for fighting likely are not complex or due to breed-specific legislation, a 

6. In Winnipeg, Manitoba, there was no difference in the incidence of dog bite hospitalizations or deaths, which increased demand leads to inappropriate breed or mix. An appropriate understanding of canine behavior invites you to share this position statement on socialization.

7. The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) provides guidelines for responsible pet ownership and public education, leading to a safer environment in owning, breeding, raising, training, and treating (both medical and behavioral problems) dogs. Dogs should support responsible ownership and public education, leading to a safer environment for both people and dogs.

8. The AVSAB Guidelines for Responsible pet ownership includes licensing, training, socializing, spay/neuter, and providing appropriate homes and veterinary care for pets.

9. Many communities are adopting or considering breed-specific legislation to prevent dog bites. The city of Calgary (Alberta, Canada) has a "Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw" requirement for pet licensing, and still fines are levied for bylaw infractions. As a result, approximately 30% of dogs that were licensed as of 2005, for non-numbering most cities in North America.

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11. In Chicago, a Task Force on Companion Animals and Public Safety was guided by public officials regarding responsible ownership, animal control, and reducing dog attacks on people.

12. The Task Force concluded that responsible ownership is the key to reducing canine aggression. After implementing an education program, the state of Nevada was able to reduce the incidence of dog bites by approximately 15% in 2000-2009. The city of Calgary (Alberta, Canada) has a "Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw" requirement for pet licensing, and still fines are levied for bylaw infractions. As a result, approximately 30% of dogs that were licensed as of 2005, for non-numbering most cities in North America.

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