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## A load of BSL?

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Last month, 12-year-old Nicholas Faibish was attacked by his family's pit bulls in their San Francisco home. He died as a result. This tragic incident, combined with other stories in the media about dog bites and maulings, has generated a lot of talk in California about what can be done to prevent dog attacks.

Many shelters, rescue groups, public officials and individuals are taking a proactive approach by educating others about spay/neuter and dog behavior and training. (One shelter is even giving money to people who bring their pit bulls in for sterilization.) But then there is another approach: Creating laws that restrict certain breeds of dogs, especially dogs who are considered "pit bulls."

Currently, California state law prohibits cities and counties from passing any laws that target a breed of dog. This kind of law is referred to as "breed-specific legislation" or BSL. For instance, municipalities can't ban a specific breed; they can't require muzzles for a specific breed; they can't even decree that one breed should get more biscuits than another.

But the times, they are a changin'.

In response to pressure from San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom, Senator Jackie Speier (D-Hillsborough) is sponsoring SB 861, a bill stating that "cities and counties may pass breed-specific legislation to address public safety and welfare concerns in their communities, provided that no program institutes a ban specific as to breed."

It's clear that everyone involved wants to see action taken to prevent future attacks, but pet owners, concerned citizens, and animal welfare groups are screaming discrimination and feel this is another case of crying wolf.

Marcy Setter of [www.understand-a-bull.com](http://www.understand-a-bull.com) states on her website: "Every 10 years or so, there is a new 'bad' breed. In the 70's it was the Doberman, 90's the Rottweilers, 00's it's the Pit Bull. Who's next? Education is critical and before passing local ordinances and state laws, our city and state officials have a responsibility to become educated on the subject matter and seek out responsible opinions from experts."

[Pit Bull Rescue Central \(PBRC\)](http://www.pitbullrescuecentral.com), an online pit bull education center, "fully supports reasonable, non-breed specific, dangerous dog laws; laws that will protect responsible owner's rights and promote a safe community for all residents."

"PBRC does not support any form of breed specific legislation (BSL), which targets specific breed(s) for restrictions or bans. We know that BSL is ineffective, costly to residents and unfair to responsible dog owners."

On June 29, the bill passed the Committee on Local Government four to three, though 11th hour amendments allow BSL only to "create breed specific spay and neuter mandates and breeding restrictions." The bill will now go to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, then to the Assembly floor, the Senate floor and finally to the governor.

There's a long way to go, but advocates of BSL have jumped the first hurdle. Only time will tell what is to come in California.

*By Lorraine Johnston*

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