

# Testimony for Favorable Recommendation of HB422

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**concerned friends of man's best friend**

## **February 20, 2014** **Support HB422 with corrective amendment**

*The Maryland Dog Federation is a dog owner advocacy group.*

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February 20, 2014

Good afternoon Chairman Vallario and members of the House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Adrienne Lefkowitz, president of the Maryland Dog Federation. For over a decade we've come before you to advocate for dog owners. We ask that you support HB422, a bill that would end a nightmare for dog owners and a huge financial burden for taxpaying Prince Georgians like me.

During the last legislative session, nearly every single delegate and senator sent a clear and convincing message that no dog is inherently dangerous simply by virtue of its breed or outward physical appearance when you voted for HB78 and SB160. We now have in HB422 the opportunity to make that message law throughout the state.

Not a single reputable animal welfare organization supports breed specific laws (BSL) The American Bar Association, the Maryland Veterinary Medical Association, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Centers for Disease Control and even the White House thinks BSL is ineffective public safety policy.

Seventeen progressive states have laws that prohibit dogs being declared dangerous solely by virtue of their breed, among them our neighbors Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. Six additional states including ours are considering prohibiting breed specific laws in their current sessions. Scores of municipalities have either considered and rejected breed specific laws recently, or had breed specific laws and recently repealed them, opting instead for behavior based, breed neutral animal public safety laws. This trend is not surprising since the popularity of the ubiquitous "pit bull mix" spans socio-economic demographics and smashes owner stereotypes...because they're good dogs!



Prince George's County, as does most of Maryland, has one of the most comprehensive breed-neutral animal control laws anywhere. It already covers dangerous dogs, potentially dangerous dogs, dogs running at large, nuisance dogs, too many dogs, and leash laws. There's not a transgression a dog or dog owner can commit that can't be covered by behavior-based, breed neutral laws.

Since 1997, it has also been host to the second largest municipality in the United States living under the stigma of a breed specific dog ban.

During that time, hundreds and hundreds of dogs have been seized, surrendered, ripped from their families, and usually killed – not for doing anything wrong, but simply for looking a particular way.

In the seventeen years since the ban's passage, way over ten thousand dogs, hundreds every year, are rounded up, most of them taken from people who love them, and killed. Family pets are taken from their living room, from kids who were lounging on the floor watching TV with them, to a stainless steel cage in a cinderblock walled, back room where they are killed and their bodies tossed away like a sack of trash. Simply for what they look like, not for anything they did. It's not necessary, it's a waste of money, and it's a really crappy thing to do to dogs and their people. It's an especially crappy thing to do to a kid who loves her dog.

I consider myself an unwilling expert on the effects of Prince George's County's BSL. I've got the numbers and the stats and the costs. I can speak about the dry data, and that over the years, more than SIXTY types of dogs, from 10 pounds to 100 pounds, are responsible for severe bites in Prince George's, or that between 80 and 95% of reported incidents by dogs are NOT SEVERE, or that 90% of those dog incidents are NOT by so-called "pit bulls". I can tell you this ban is a huge drain on county resources and tax dollars. The ban costs STILL between a quarter million and a half million taxpayer dollars each and every year unnecessarily rounding up family pets – even as animal management's budget has been repeatedly and severely slashed. I can tell you that enforcing the ban takes up scores of manhours each and every week, and takes resources away from dealing with dangerous dogs, cruelty cases, even taking care of the animals in the shelter and getting them adopted into good homes. I can tell you this ban doesn't protect anyone.

I'd rather tell you about the broken hearted people who have contacted me over the years. The Federation has received hundreds of phone calls and emails over the years from people who can't believe their good dog has been ripped away



from them. On more than one occasion I heard from someone who moved to Prince George's from somewhere where it didn't matter what kind of dog they had, or what it looked like. They are moving in with their stuff and next thing they know, animal control is knocking on their door to tell them there's been a complaint that they have "a pit bull" and they must either get it out of the county or surrender it to them. A complaint? About a dog that just moved in? That hasn't even had a chance to be a good dog or even to be a bad dog? Welcome to the neighborhood, we've come to take your dog.

Other calls we get are from people who find a pup on the street, or rescue the pup from a bad situation. They have no idea what kind of dog it is. But if it looks like it could be a "pit bull", it could be seized from them. That's no way to encourage kindness.

I can tell you that dogs are constantly being identified, misidentified, reidentified, and mistakenly identified. For the most part, it's all arbitrary. Animal control can say your dog is a pit bull mix and take it away, or they can say it's an American Bulldog mix, or a pointer mix, or a lab mix and you can keep your dog. Or you could go through life thinking your dog is a boxer mix. You move into a new apartment and two months later your there's a notice on your door that you have a pit bull, you're in violation of your lease and you have to get out or get rid of your dog. In most cases it's nothing more than a guess by someone who is not an expert in breed identification. Indeed, even the experts get it wrong. It shouldn't matter what your dog looks like. If you are living peaceably with your dog, if your dog isn't hurting anyone, It. Shouldn't. Matter.

That's why HB422 is important.



We do need a small, critical amendment to HB422 to correct an omission during bill drafting, which is:

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4lr0971

## HB422 & crossfile amendments

1. Page 1, after word 1 on line 4 , ADD: , DANGEROUS, INHERENTLY DANGEROUS, OR A NUISANCE
2. Page 2, after line 17, ADD: (3) A DOG MAY NOT BE DETERMINED TO BE DANGEROUS BASED SOLELY ON THE BREED, TYPE, OR HERITAGE OF THE DOG.
3. Page 2, line 18, CHANGE: ~~(3)~~ (4)
4. Page 2, line23, CHANGE: ~~(4)~~ (5)

