

National Pit Bull Victim Awareness Day Event

October 24, 2019

Michigan State Capitol building steps in Lansing, Michigan
Sponsored by Responsible Citizens for Public Safety (RC4PS.org)

Keynote Speech by

Colleen Lynn, Founder of DogsBite.org

Opening

It is an honor to be here today—the first public event held by Responsible Citizens for Public Safety. Today we are acknowledging and honoring National Pit Bull Victim Awareness Day. This special day began on October 24, 2015 by a coalition of over 50 support groups in the United States and Canada. Today marks the fifth celebration of an event that recognizes the thousands of victims of violent pit bull attacks each year in North America.¹

Today we honor the survivors of these attacks and we remember the children, adults and grandparents who did not survive their severe injuries.

We are also here today because we are trying to make our communities safer.

All of us here today are **on the right side of this issue.**

The Enduring High Profile Pit Bull Maulings

High profile dog maulings carried out by pit bulls began in the 1980s and persist today at a higher rate. Back then, the pit bull population was estimated to be 1% of the total dog population.² Today, pit bulls and their mixes are estimated to be 6 to 8% of the total dog population.³

Not only are these public maulings more frequent today, there are more avenues to see them—when footage goes viral on social media.

¹ Press release: [Pit Bull Crisis Prompts Support Groups to Declare October 24th National Pit Bull Victim Awareness Day](#), Daxton's Friends for Canine Education and Awareness, October 14, 2015 (prweb.com).

² EM Swift, "[The Pit Bull: Friend and Killer](#)," *Sports Illustrated*, July 27, 1987 (si.com).

³ "[Breed survey 2019: more puppies, yet fewer homes for pit bulls](#)," *Animals* 24-7, July 9, 2019.

In the early 1990s, rottweilers entered the fray, also inflicting violent high profile maulings. The era of “dog bites” as we knew them to once be—when a dog “bites and releases”—became overshadowed by the newly dawning threat of a catastrophic dog mauling.

Twenty years later, these high profile dog maulings continue to be carried out—largely by pit bulls and rottweilers. These same two dog breeds have dominated U.S. fatal dog attack statistics for multiple decades. The CDC stated in 2000:

*“The data indicate that rottweilers and pit bull-type dogs accounted for 67% of human DBRF in the United States between 1997 and 1998. It is extremely unlikely that they accounted for anywhere near 60% of dogs in the US during that same period and, thus, **there appears to be a breed-specific problem with fatalities.**”⁴*

Today these two breeds make up 76% of all fatal dog maulings—and that is over a 14-year period, not a 2-year period noted by the CDC.⁵

Both pit bulls and rottweilers are recognized dangerous dog breeds due to the severity of their attacks. Many countries around the world impose restrictions on them, but primarily these laws target pit bulls and other mastiff-type fighting breeds.

With this type of evidence, one might ask, “Why does this problem persist today? And persist enough that victims’ groups had to establish a national awareness day for it?” Why are we still enduring this problem when in 1998 the highest court in Maryland stated—referencing rulings before them:

“The extreme dangerousness of this breed, as it has evolved today, is well recognized ... Indeed, it has been judicially noted that pit bulls ‘bit[e] to kill without signal’ ... ‘pit bull dogs represent a unique public health hazard ... [possessing] both the capacity for extraordinarily savage behavior ... coupled with an unpredictable nature...’⁶

The public maulings persist because many local lawmakers and state legislators refuse to act. Instead, they remain silent and tolerate barbaric attacks by these known dangerous dog breeds. The CDC tolerates them too, the “nation’s health

⁴ Sacks JJ, Sinclair L, Gilchrist J, Golab GC and Lockwood R, [Breeds of dogs involved in fatal human attacks in the United States between 1979 and 1998](#), *J Am Vet Med Assoc*, 2000 Sep 15;217(6):836-40.

⁵ [14 Year U.S. Dog Bite Fatality Chart - 2005 to 2018](#), DogsBite.org, April 28, 2019 (dogsbite.org).

⁶ [Matthews v. Amberwood](#), 719 A.2d 119, Court of Appeals of Maryland, October 7, 1998 (scholar.google.com).

protection agency.” Nearly 400 Americans have been brutally killed by pit bulls since the CDC stopped collecting breed data for fatal dog attacks in 1998.⁷

So here we are today—honoring National Pit Bull Victim Awareness Day.

Delta Air Lines

Last night, I flew into Detroit from Austin on a Delta flight.

Today, I will return to Austin on a Delta flight.

Why is this important?

Because Delta is serious about my safety in the cabin, especially when the plane is operating at 35,000 feet and traveling over 500 miles per hour.⁸

In 2018, after multiple attacks on employees and passengers, Delta banned pit bulls as service and support dogs in the cabin.⁹ The fraud and abuse of “fake” service and support dogs on aircrafts reached its tipping point. Passengers had escalated from bringing untrained non-threatening dog breeds onboard to bringing **untrained** larger breeds under the guise of a service or support animal.

Delta’s view is that “untrained, pit bull-type dogs posing as both service and support animals are a potential safety risk.”¹⁰

Delta’s view is self-evident and is also backed up by their own statistics.

In August, the Department of Transportation issued its final enforcement guidance. The DOT admitted in the guidance that parts of the current Rule are undefined—including how airlines may or may not assess whether or not a service animal poses a “direct threat to the health or safety of others.” However, the DOT disagreed with Delta’s ban, and went as far as to say, “the Department is not aware of and has not been presented with evidence supporting the assertion that an animal poses a direct threat simply because of its breed.”¹¹

But, the DOT failed to look next-door.

⁷ [Fatal Pit Bull Attacks](#), Accessed, October 19, 2019 (fatalpitbullattacks.com).

⁸ [How Fast Do Commercial Airlines Fly?](#), FlightDeckFriends.com, accessed October 18, 2019.

⁹ [Delta updates policy, limits each customer to one support animal effective July 10](#), Delta News Hub, June 20, 2018 (news.delta.com).

¹⁰ Kelli Bender, “[Delta Airlines Bans Pit Bull-Type Service and Emotional Support Dogs from All Flights](#),” *People*, June 22, 2018 (people.com).

¹¹ [Final Statement of Enforcement Priorities Regarding Service Animals, U.S. Department of Transportation](#) [Docket No. DOT-OST-2018-0067], August 8, 2019 (transportation.gov).

A decade ago, the United States military established a federal precedent for a pit bull ban. In 2009, the U.S. Army, the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Air Force banned pit bulls and several other dog breeds from privatized housing.¹² The Marine Corps order states, in part: “Pit bulls, rottweilers, wolf hybrids, or any canine breed with dominant traits of aggression present an unreasonable risk to the health and safety of personnel in family housing areas.”¹³

After the DOT issued its final guidance, it gave airlines 30 days to change policies “inconsistent” with the current Rule.

On September 23rd, Delta fired back declaring that it is continuing its ban on pit bulls as service and support animals in order to “protect the airline’s employees, customers and trained service animals.” And that “Delta has not come to a solution for allowing pit bulls onboard that satisfies its own rigorous safety requirements.”¹⁴

Delta Airlines cares more about passenger safety—**my safety and your safety**—than the United States Department of Transportation. The same government agency that failed to look next-door at a 10 year old federal precedent created by the U.S. military.

In defiance of the DOT, Delta is keeping their pit bull ban until the DOT can provide a method to determine whether or not a service animal poses a “direct threat to the health or safety of others.”

Delta is a for-profit corporation, which typically acts of behalf of its shareholders. Yet, Delta has entered the pit bull debate and put their foot down.

They put their foot down **because the government would not**.

Why I Started DogsBite.org

People often ask me why I started DogsBite.org.

The website was launched in October of 2007. The first edition was based upon a 20-page white paper I wrote for the City of Seattle after I was attacked by a leashed pit bull while jogging in my neighborhood earlier that year.¹⁵

The attack occurred on Father’s Day. It was an unpleasant call to my father while riding in the Medic One truck.

¹² The Air Force (and Air Force Space Command), adopted a [breed-specific policy earlier](#), in 2006.

¹³ [Marine Corps Order P11000.22 Chapter 6](#), August 11, 2009, Department of Defense.

¹⁴ [Delta updates service and support animal policy following DOT guidance](#), Delta News Hub, September 23, 2019 (news.delta.com).

¹⁵ [Animal Control Bite Report of Colleen Lynn](#), Seattle Animal Shelter, June 17, 2007 (dogsbite.org).

“I was attacked by a pit bull,” I said. I did not need to explain the damage to my father—the damage was inherent in the words “pit bull.”

What could any father say? Mine let out a gasp.

I also had my first experience with an animal control officer that day. About 15 minutes after the paramedics treated and wrapped my arm, and while I was sitting in the Medic One truck, an AC officer came in to check the severity of my injuries.

Speaking to the paramedics, she said: “You’ve already wrapped her! Now I can’t see her injury!” Then she let out a loud exasperated sigh.

Dead silence followed in that truck with myself, two paramedics and the AC officer all at close range. The AC officer was staring at one of the paramedics, who stared right back at her and said nothing. The tension was enormous. So I blurted out the obvious question to the AC officer:

“Were they supposed to leave me **bleeding on the street** until you arrived?”

I don’t know this then and I won’t know this for several more years. But that surreal moment distinctly represents how many dog bite victims are treated by the “system” we are suddenly yanked into after a vicious dog attack.

That moment of dead silence—when I knew something was terribly wrong in that Medic One truck—will be repeated many times over in the subsequent months as I encounter each aspect of a “system” that is broken for many victims of violent dog attacks. From my asking: “What do you mean the dog has not been put down?”

To my asking: “Why is this attack is **not considered a crime?**”

After My Own Attack

After my own attack, I wanted to make my community safer. Even if I could only make it “one step closer to a safer community.”¹⁶ This is an important distinction, and also the reason why most of us are here today. We are seeking common sense legislation to protect public safety.

I asked myself, “What could I do that could prevent this from happening to someone else?”

¹⁶ The phrase, “one step closer to a safer community” are the words of John Welsh, a spokesman for the Riverside County Department of Animal Services in California. After a series of brutal pit bulls attacks, Riverside County passed a mandatory pit bull sterilization law in 2013. Welsh said the ordinance “doesn’t solve all problems,” but it is “one step closer to a safer community.” David Downey, [“Pit bulls: ‘Unnerving’ fatal attack near Salton Sea alarms region,”](#) *The Press-Enterprise*, September 10, 2015 (pe.com).

In March of 2008, after months of researching the issue, I submitted a 20-page white paper to the public safety chair of Seattle City Council (“Proactive Dog Policy: Why Seattle Needs It”).¹⁷ The paper examined the national pit bull problem, Seattle’s pit bull problem and the heritage of the pit bull breed. The paper, in part, recommended that the city follow in the steps of San Francisco, which had enacted a mandatory pit bull sterilization law a few years earlier.

Sterilization does not remedy learned behaviors. But a sterilized pit bull is less likely to bolt from its home, wander the neighborhood and attack someone, which is a clear public safety threat.¹⁸ Reducing the overall population of pit bulls in a community also benefits public safety.

My paper was met with silence from city council. Their decision was to continue to tolerate the maulings. Instead of throwing my paper away, I wove it into the website DogsBite.org. Maybe my research could help other jurisdictions? After all, some jurisdictions had already been contacting me.

A national resource like DogsBite.org was needed.

The Library of DogsBite.org

Since 2007, DogsBite.org has grown into several thousand pages. We are an “online library” for dog attack victims, attorneys, researchers and lawmakers. Prior to the nonprofit, there was no resource for dog attack victims that catalogued the many layers of this problem. We track a range of items in our library:

- We track breed-specific laws in all 50 states and the constitutionality of these laws.
- We track military breed-specific policies.
- We track state preemption laws that prohibit local governments from enacting breed-specific laws.
- Our library also tracks new dangerous dog law trends.

On that front, two states, Virginia and California have recently passed “Mandatory Bite Disclosure” laws that requires all “releasing agencies”—shelters, rescues and humane groups—to disclose the bite history of a dog to an adopter. That is how **untrustworthy these groups have become**.¹⁹

¹⁷ Colleen Lynn, [Proactive Dog Policy: Why Seattle Needs It](#), March 2, 2008 (dogsbite.org).

¹⁸ David Downey, “Pit bulls: Attack alarms region,” *The Press-Enterprise*, September 9, 2015 (pe.com).

¹⁹ The Virginia bill, [Senate Bill 571](#), was signed into law on March 30, 2018. The California bill, [Assembly Bill 588](#), was signed into law on October 2, 2019.

The new law first arose in Virginia after a rehomed pit bull brutally killed a grandmother within one day of being adopted. The rescue failed to disclose the dog's bite history to the victim's daughter.²⁰

While Virginia legislators discussed the new bill, proponents of the bill told them it would guarantee that people are made aware of bite histories, and one lawmaker replied, **“You mean they don't do that?”**²¹

In our library, we also track severe dog bite injuries, both fatal and nonfatal.

Every year, we deliver the benchmark statistics in U.S. fatal dog maulings. The CDC abandoned this duty in 2000. This effort has now become a function of nonprofit organizations. Last week, we released new data on pit bull trends over a 14-year period, 2005 to 2018. Here is a summary:

- 66% of all fatal dog maulings are perpetrated by pit bulls.
- 49% of all infant mortalities due to dog maulings are inflicted by pit bulls.
- 73% of adult mortalities due to dog maulings are perpetrated by pit bulls.
- And lastly, women, 30-years and older, are now the most frequent victims of fatal pit bull mauling violence.

In the nonfatal injuries category, our library tracks peer-reviewed medical studies from Level 1 trauma centers that analyze severe dog bite injuries.

*“From 2011 to present day, 13 peer-reviewed medical studies from Level 1 trauma centers spanning all major geographical regions in the U.S.—the Northeast, Southeast, South, Southwest, Midwest, West Coast and Northwest—all report similar findings. Pit bulls are inflicting a higher prevalence of injuries than all other dog breeds. The majority of these studies also report that pit bulls are inflicting a higher severity of injuries, requiring a higher number of operative interventions -- up to five times higher -- than other dog breeds.”*²²

During this same period, 2011 to present day, there were also four peer-reviewed studies from the Denver region, including a large-scale pediatric study.²³ In

²⁰ [2017 Dog Bite Fatality: Rescue Pit Bull Attacks, Kills Elderly Woman in Virginia Beach Hours After Being Adopted](#), DogsBite.org, Last updated November 11, 2017 (dogsbite.org)

²¹ Ryan Murphy, “[After fatal Virginia Beach mauling, law would require bite histories for adopted pets](#),” *The Virginian-Pilot*, December 13, 2017 (pilotonline.com)

²² Level 1 Trauma Center Studies Characterizing Dog Bite Injuries Across Major U.S. Geographical Regions (2011-2019), DogsBite.org. December 2019. Our [Level 1 trauma table page](#) will be updated to 2019 in December.

²³ Chen HH, Neumeier AT, Davies BW and Durairaj VD, [Analysis of Pediatric Facial Dog Bites, Craniomaxillofac Trauma Reconstr](#), September 2013;6:225-232.

1989, Denver enacted a pit bull ban. No one is surprised that findings in the Denver region are different than the rest of the country. The pediatric study showed a lower prevalence of pit bull injuries compared to other dog breeds. It states in part:

“Pit bulls were banned in Denver because of several gruesome maulings and fatalities that occurred between 1984 and 1989. Our study found 11 victims of pit bull bites from 2003 to 2008, including the patient who suffered the most extensive injuries and the longest hospitalization of our entire population.”

The prevalence of pit bull injuries decreased after enacting the ban. But they could not escape the **horrific severity of injury** when a pit bull was involved in an attack. The argument for breed-specific laws has always been about the severity of injury, which can be catastrophic.

From a national perspective, Denver is the “**control factor**” in all of these studies. In a 2017 meta-study published in the *Journal of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons*, they reviewed dog bite studies in the United States from 1958 to 2016. Part of their findings included the following:

“Since 2001, Pit Bull type breeds have accounted for the largest subset of dog bites reported in the medical literature (37.5%) ... In addition to these findings, we evaluated the effectiveness of breed specific legislation in Denver, CO, the largest jurisdiction in the United States with a pit bull ban in place. Since 2001, 5.7% of bites in Denver, CO were attributed to Pit Bull type breeds compared to 54.4% in the remainder of the United States.”²⁴

5.7% in Denver versus 54.4% in the remainder of the U.S.

More meta-studies like this one are on the horizon. My nonprofit will certainly be reporting on them.

Lastly, and the most important part of our online library is the documentation of hundreds of individual dog attacks and accounts by victims through investigations, victim impact statements, media reports, videos and legislation.

²⁴ Baily C, Hinchcliff K, Pu L, [Abstract: A Review of Dog Bites in the United States from 1958 to 2016: Systematic Review of the Peer-Reviewed Literature](#), *Plast Reconstr Surg Glob Open*. 2017 Abstract Supplement, Presentations at the American Society of Plastic Surgeons’ Annual Meeting: Plastic Surgery The Meeting 2017, 2017 Sep; 5(9 Suppl): 172-173.

We track all of this information to show readers the multi-layered dangerous dog breed problem and how victims are adversely affected by it. Some of these layers Include:

- Many cities have laws that only take effect after a person has been attacked. Whereas the function of a breed-specific law is to prevent FIRST attacks by recognized dangerous dog breeds.
- Most cities are plagued by the “vicious dog loop”. After a dog attacks a person and is declared dangerous, the owner puts the dog down and buys another pit bull and the process starts all over again.
- Trafficking dangerous dogs. After a vicious attack—or multiple attacks—and the dog is adjudicated as “dangerous” it is common for the owner to move the dog to a new county or across state lines, whereby eluding the dangerous designation.
- Over the years, we have seen animal control departments shift their priorities to “adoptions” instead of public safety. Dog bites are always rising in this country, but bite investigations for serious dog bite injuries are falling in parts of the country.
- Over the years, we have seen shelter policies—such as the toxic “no-kill equation”—result in dangerous dogs being adopted to the public. Along with the unhealthy trend of “rescuing” dogs after vicious attacks.

Finally, add to this the many lawmakers who stay silent while blankly looking at the overwhelming scientific evidence showing the dangerousness of pit bulls. An issue that is self-evident to begin with.

Pit bulls were selectively bred to take down bulls and to fight to the death in a pit. There is no appropriate context for these behaviors today.

Our Adversaries

I will cover one more aspect about my nonprofit before I address Michigan-related issues. Our adversaries—they are small in numbers, but loud.

Historically, those who bring truth to light about unpopular issues are targeted by their adversaries. Their opponents try to discredit them. Certainly, this has been the case for my nonprofit and myself since I began this journey twelve years ago.

Very early on in the history of DogsBite.org I had to make a decision. A tough decision about my commitment due to the volumes of harassment I was receiving. This was before I even submitted my white paper to city council.

Tough decisions like this one required a phone call to my mother. So I called my mother and told her, “This is going to get ugly—really ugly. I’m not sure if I can actually do this.”

Years later, while I was struggling with another unfair attack on my credibility—all because I advocate for victims of dog maulings—my mother reminded me of that phone call in 2008.

“You were clear and measured about the difficult road that lie ahead,” she said to me. “You took some time to think about it and determined that your only choice was to keep going—no matter how hard it became. Too many people were being severely injured and killed by these dogs.”

I thanked her for reminding me of that phone call.

Winning Amicus Brief

The credibility of DogsBite.org can be summed up in one sentence—“In 2012, the highest court in Maryland validated our credibility.”

In October 2011, my nonprofit submitted an amicus brief to the Maryland Court of appeals in the landmark case *Tracey v. Solesky*. It reads in part:

*“DogsBite.org advocates from the perspective of victims of pit bull attacks and wants to promote the development of law which protects innocent people from pit bull attacks. It is desirable for this Court to receive information from DogsBite.org in rebuttal to the ASPCA’s positions, which seek to **downplay the significant differences** between pit bulls and other dogs.”²⁵*

This was a David and Goliath situation.

We were up against one of the largest humane societies in the country. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) was taking in close to \$150 million dollars at that time.²⁶ During 2011, my nonprofit raised only \$10,000 dollars.

We were small. And we were on the right side of the issue.

²⁵ [Brief of Amicus Curiae, Dogsbite.org in Support of Appellees](#) (*Tracey v. Solesky*, October Term, 2011, Docket No. 53)

²⁶ [American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals \(ASPCA\)](#), Activists Facts, 2011, \$148,247,629 (activistfacts.com)

On April 26, 2012, the Court issued their landmark ruling.²⁷

The Maryland Court of Appeals declared pit bulls “inherently dangerous” and attached strict liability when a pit bull attacks a person. This liability extended to landlords when a tenant’s pit bull attacks a person.²⁸

It was a stunning victory for victims of violent pit bull maulings in the state of Maryland. **Our amicus brief had prevailed.** The Court went as far as pointing out in their decision that the opposing brief written by the ASPCA was “unpersuasive.”

We may be small, but we accomplish BIG things.

Public Health Heroes

As many public health experts will tell you, even a single person working undeterred to make the world a “safer place” can succeed. Many public health heroes did not even have public health training—they just had passion and grit.²⁹

And they were on the right side of the issue.

Trying to make the world a “safer place” or trying to make a community “one step closer to a safer community” is ALWAYS the winning side.

The State of Michigan

Michigan is strict liability state.³⁰ That is great news for victims of dog attacks in your state. Dog owners are held strictly liable after a damaging dog bite. The downside of strict liability is that it is only feasible if the dog owner has homeowner’s insurance that covers canine bites. There may be no way to hold an owner strictly liable if the person is a renter or is uninsured. Rentals make up 37% of the U.S. housing market.³¹

Michigan is also one of the few states in the country that has a felony dog attack statute—more great news for Michigan dog attack victims.³² This statute is now being

²⁷ [Tracey v. Solesky](#), 50 A.3d 1075, Court of Appeals of Maryland, April 26, 2012 (mdcourts.gov).

²⁸ In 2014, after two years of lobbying and legislative attempts to mute the high court’s ruling, the legislature passed a paltry and *embarrassing* dog bite statute in response to the Court’s ruling—[effectively muting the high court’s ruling](#). The Court’s ruling still remains the seminal ruling in 49 states declaring pit bulls “inherently dangerous.” Only the Court of Appeals of Maryland can “overturn” the 2012 *Solesky* ruling.

²⁹ David Hemenway, [While We Were Sleeping, Success Stories in Injury and Violence Prevention](#), *University of California Press*, 2009 (Pg. 171-172).

³⁰ [Michigan Dog Bite Law](#), DogBiteLaw.com, Accessed, October 18, 2019 (dogbitelaw.com).

³¹ David Montgomery, [Who Owns a Home in America, in 12 Charts](#), CityLab, August 8, 2019 (citylab.com).

³² [Section 287.323](#). Offenses and penalties, effective March 30, 1989 (animallaw.info).

played out once again in Detroit after three pit bulls escaped their property and brutally killed 9-year old Emma Hernandez. Pierre Cleveland has been charged with second-degree murder, involuntary manslaughter and possessing dangerous animals causing death. His criminal trial will likely be held next year.³³

Currently, Detroit City Council President Brenda Jones is proposing a mandatory spay and neuter ordinance for “large dogs” -- all dogs over 35 pounds -- which would include all pit bulls.³⁴ It is called the “Xavier Strickland Ordinance Update and Amendments,”³⁵ named after a 4-year old boy who was disemboweled by four loose pit bulls in Detroit in 2015.³⁶

The theme is clear in Detroit. They have a large number of pit bulls being bred in backyards and no ordinance to stop it. Though Jones’ proposal is non-breed specific, the Michigan Humane Society was quick to condemn it.

There is a starting point for everything—Jones’ proposal is exactly that. Despite it being non-breed specific, Jones will still face an uphill battle.

Though “education” of spay and neuter is critical, education alone will not solve irresponsible dog ownership issues. This must be backed up by laws. No public health or safety problem has ever been solved through education alone. There is a reason why too. Changing individual human behaviors is virtually impossible through education alone.³⁷

During the 1960s we did not “educate” car owners to “become better drivers.” That is what the automobile industry had wanted—they blamed the increasing number of vehicle-related fatalities on “bad drivers.”³⁸

One year after the publication of Ralph Nader’s book, “Unsafe at Any Speed,” Congress unanimously enacted the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act. The act forced the automobile industry to **build safer cars**—which was the proper solution.³⁹ Human behavior changes through mandatory seat belt laws followed.

³³ [2019 Dog Bite Fatality: 9-Year Old Girl Mauled to Death by Three Pit Bulls on Detroit's West Side](#), DogsBite.org, Last updated August 22, 2019 (blog.dogsbite.org)

³⁴ Kimberly Craig, “[Detroit council president proposing mandatory spay/neuter for large dogs in wake of girl's death](#),” WXYZ, September 4, 2019.

³⁵ [Xavier Strickland Ordinance Update and Amendments](#), Council president, Brenda Jones, September 3, 2019. (scribd.com)

³⁶ [Criminal Trial: Detroit Pit Bull Owner Convicted on Two Counts of Manslaughter After His Dogs Brutally Killed a Young Boy](#), DogsBite.org (blog.dogsbite.org).

³⁷ Hemenway, 2009 (Pg. 168-169).

³⁸ Hemenway, 2009 (Pg. 164-166).

³⁹ [National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act](#), Wikipedia, Accessed, October 18, 2019 (wikipedia.com)

One important lesson learned from the public health industry, which strives to prevent injuries under the motto “prevention is better than cure,” is that:

“Laws can have a beneficial effect, even when there is little enforcement and some people flout the law.”⁴⁰

The Michigan Humane Society claims Jones’ proposal is not only a bad solution, but that it would somehow compound the problem in Detroit. The humane society offered **zero solutions—zero**.⁴¹

Everyone knows that continuing the status quo in Detroit will lead to more preventable violent dog attacks, some of which will be fatal. So, what is the starting point for Detroit?

Jones’ proposal.

Enact a mandatory spay and neuter ordinance for all “large dogs.” Offer low cost spay and neuter services and free spay/neuter vouchers for those who need it.

The last 3 fatal dog attacks in Detroit each involved 3 or more pit bulls—all from home spun breeding operations.⁴²

More sterilized large dogs in Detroit will benefit public safety and will eventually lower intake and euthanasia numbers at the city shelter.

This is the right side of the issue to be on.

Michigan House Bill 4035

In order to reduce a growing population of unwanted pit bulls entering the shelter, Ypsilanti Township adopted a mandatory pit bull spay/neuter ordinance.⁴³ Within two years, there was nearly a 50% decrease in pit bull intake and a 58% decrease in pit bull euthanasia.

“The numbers speak for themselves,” officials said at that time.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Hemenway, 2009 (Pg. 10).

⁴¹ Matt Pepper, “[MHS CEO: Mandatory Spay and Neuter of Dogs in Detroit Will Only Compound the Problem](#),” Michigan Humane Society, September 10, 2019.

⁴² [Xavier Strickland](#), 4-years old, 2015. [Elizabeth Rivera](#), 71-years old, 2016. [Emma Hernandez](#), 9-years old, 2019, U.S. Dog Bite Fatalities (2015-2019). DogsBite.org.

⁴³ Tom Perkins, “[Ypsilanti Township considers extending mandatory pit bull sterilization ordinance](#),” *The Ann Arbor News*, December 17, 2012 (annarbor.com).

⁴⁴ Tom Perkins, “[Ypsilanti Township makes pit bull spay/neuter ordinance permanent](#),” *The Ann Arbor News*, January 15, 2013 (annarbor.com).

By January 2013, more than 700 pit bulls had been sterilized free of charge by a grant awarded to their humane agency from PetSmart. The township accomplished their goal without spending a dime.

The language of HB 4035 is clear:

“A local unit of government shall not enact or enforce an ordinance, policy, resolution or rule that regulates a dog based upon breed or perceived breed.”⁴⁵

For political purposes—certainly not humane purposes—some Michigan legislators want to strip Ypsilanti Township officials from governing their own animal control policies. They want to strip this right from all municipalities who currently have a breed-specific law or may be considering one.

Since 2015, various legislators in Michigan have introduced these preemption bills. In 2015, 2016 and 2018 advocates for health and safety helped defeat these bills. Ann Marie and others attended the Michigan House and Senate hearings and gave powerful presentations. Thank you!

In Closing

Humane organizations are not public health experts.

They also have no mission to protect human lives.

We hope Council President Brenda Jones takes the “zero solution” offered by the Michigan Humane Society and throws it into the garbage. Continuing the status quo in Detroit will ensure continued high-profile dog maulings and deaths in that city. There is a starting point for everything—Jones’ proposal is exactly that.

The Growing Scientific Evidence

The scientific evidence about the dangerousness of pit bulls continues to grow. Nearly 20 appellate court decisions have recognized the “extreme dangerousness” of the pit bull breed since the mid 1980s. The 20-year CDC fatal dog attack study that ended in 1998 showed that pit bulls inflicted 32% of fatal dog maulings—a total of 76 deaths.⁴⁶ Over the last 14-years, pit bulls inflicted 66% of fatal dog maulings—a total of 311 deaths.⁴⁷ That is a 309% rise in the number of deaths.

⁴⁵ [House Bill 4035](#), Sponsor Rep. Jim Ellison, Michigan Legislature, Session 2019-2020 (legislature.mi.gov)

⁴⁶ Sacks JJ et al., 2000. Pit bulls were involved in 76 of 238 deaths during the 20-year CDC study (1979 to 1998) and 311 of 471 deaths during a recent 14-year period (2005 to 2018).

⁴⁷ [14 Year U.S. Dog Bite Fatality Chart - 2005 to 2018](#), DogsBite.org, April 28, 2019 (dogsbite.org).

From 2011 to present day, over a dozen peer-reviewed scientific studies spanning all major geographical regions in the U.S. are reporting that pit bulls are inflicting a higher prevalence of injuries than all other dog breeds at Level 1 trauma centers. These are centers that treat the most severe injuries of all.

The majority of these Level 1 trauma studies also report that pit bulls are inflicting a higher severity of injuries—requiring up to 5 times the relative rate of surgery compared to other dog breeds. Scientific studies in this area only increasing.

Despite the overwhelming evidence today, many lawmakers continue to be silent and tolerate severe maulings by pit bulls.

- This is unacceptable in 41 other countries.
- This is unacceptable in over 1,000 jurisdictions in the US.⁴⁸
- This is unacceptable in all three major military divisions in the US.
- This is unacceptable to Delta Airlines too.

Remember—Delta Airlines cares more about passenger safety—**your safety and my safety**—than our own government does.

Finding Solutions

Solutions will vary from city to city. The goal is to make a community safer. Even if we can only make it “one step closer to a safer community”

A mandatory pit bull sterilization law is the most basic safety step a community can take when pit bulls are disproportionately biting, disproportionately occupying shelter space and disproportionately being euthanized.

This is the right side of the issue to be on.

Thank you for being here today!

Colleen Lynn
President & Founder
DogsBite.org

DogsBite.org is a national dog bite victims' group dedicated to reducing serious dog attacks. Through our work, we hope to protect both people and pets from future attacks.



DogsBite.org

⁴⁸ [Estimated U.S. Cities, Counties, States and Military Facilities with Breed-Specific Pit Bull Laws](#), DogsBite.org, Last updated: December 20, 2018 (scribd.com). This document also shows that 52 countries worldwide have jurisdictions with breed-specific laws, and in 41 of those countries, it is a national-level law.