

## Florida Considers Dangerous Dog Breed Ban

**A new bill may grant Florida cities the right to ban any dog breed they deem “dangerous.”**

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Florida State Representative Perry Thurston, D-Plantation, is sponsoring a new state bill that would give cities the right to ban any breed of dog they see as “dangerous.”

A dangerous dog is defined, in part, as a dog who has aggressively bitten, attacked, or endangered, or has inflicted severe injury on a human being; has more than once severely injured or killed a domestic animal while off the owner’s property; is a dog trained for dogfighting; and has, when unprovoked, chased or approached a person on a street, sidewalk or any public grounds in a menacing fashion or apparent attitude of attack.

HB 101 would amend Florida’s existing “Damage by Dogs” statute, which limits municipal breed bans, but holds owners liable for their dogs’ damage.

If approved, the bill could go into effect July 1.

“My primary concern is for the safety of other people and their pets who have to deal with dangerous dogs on the streets, in dog parks, and even outside their own homes,” Thurston told the Miami Herald.

“In situations where targeting the individual owner is not enough to ensure public safety, individual cities should have the right to target certain problem breeds,” he said, adding that a ban should be a last resort after leash and muzzling laws, fines, and arrests have been unsuccessful.

However, bill opponents — the Humane Society of the United States and the Florida Animal Control Association — say it’s not the breed, but a dog’s behavior that should be in question.

There’s also not enough statistical evidence that a ban creates fewer dog bites, the newspaper reports. Although Miami-Dade County has banned pit bulls for the past 20 years, it’s unknown whether or not the ban has been successful. The department only began compiling bite statistics in 2005.

If the bill passes, it is likely that bans would extend beyond just pit bulls. For instance, the top dangerous dogs in Palm Beach are Labrador Retriever, Shepherd, and Chow mixes, according to the newspaper.

Some critics say that the dangerous dog laws are effective, but just not being enforced.

“Banning a breed does nothing to solve dangerous-dog problems,” Dr. Welch Agnew, president of the Florida Animal Control Association, told the Miami Herald. “All it does is target well-behaved dogs owned by good dog owners — who lose their pets due to this kind of legislation.”

Such a ban would require the county to conduct DNA testing to prove that a targeted dog is in fact that banned dog breed. A dog’s breed cannot be determined by appearance alone, Agnew said.