

**From:** Tom O'Brien

**Sent:** Tuesday, February 27, 2024 11:12 PM

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**Subject:** [External] H536 - Breed Discrimination

[External]

Good Evening,

I write to you this evening in support of H536 which your committee is currently considering. I have read thru the current version of the Draft Bill and find it to be both a reasonable and fair approach to the issue of balancing responsible dog ownership and insurance pricing and policy practices.

The most important aspect of this issue is that a dog's breed is not the determining factor when assessing the risk that a particular dog poses to its owner, the family of its owner and the public in general. In my experience, if there is a reliable predictor of dog aggression it is the character and conduct of the owner of the particular dog relative to how the dog has been trained and cared for.

While my wife and I have been dog owners here in Vermont for over 40 years, my particular reason for writing today is to speak to you of my personal experience working closely with dogs of all breeds over the past 12 years in my position as both a licensed Agility Judge of the American Kennel Club and as one of only 90 Volunteer Measuring Officials (VMOs) of the American Kennel Club (AKC).

In 2021, AKC clubs sponsored 4,146 agility trials at which over 1,185,538 entries of AKC dogs were recorded. AKC allows all dogs - purebreds and mixed breed dogs - to participate side-by-side in its agility program based only on their height. They are not separated by breed, no breeds are prohibited from participating and no special precautions are required for any of the dogs that participate.

As an Agility Judge, I judge 10-15 weekends a year with an average of 300 -325 individual judging experiences each day. Every one of those dog were measured twice by two different VMOs like me to validate their heights so that they compete in the correct group. This measurement process requires a hands-on interaction with the dog and takes anywhere from 2 minutes to 10 minutes depending on the dog. As a VMO, I typically have never met the dogs I measure, I have no choice over the breed of dog I measure and I have little time to assess the

dog before working face-face with each dog with my hands on the dog and my face and body within inches of their mouths. I've learned the dog's breed doesn't matter.

I've measured Pit Bulls and Pekinese, Dobermans and Dalmations, Cocker Spaniels and Rottweilers - often one right after another as they have stood together waiting their turns. I have measured as many as 75 dogs in a single day and over 100 dogs in a single weekend. If any of these breed were inherently aggressive, uncontrollable or untrustworthy I would know by now.

Can dogs be aggressive? Hard to control? Unpredictable? Yes of course they can - especially when abused, neglected or ignored. As can people. In my experience, any dog - no matter the breed, size, age, color, height or weight - has the possibility of exhibiting aggressive behavior. New-born puppies are similar in that respect to new-born humans - an innocent and reasonably blank slate whose personalities, intelligence and behavior will be shaped largely by the life experiences and the environment in which they will grow up.

And that's my point. Each dog and person is unique and a product of their upbringing, their environment and the way they are treated. Bill H536 correctly recognizes this and avoids singling out individual breeds in the same way that our laws avoid singling out people of individual races, nationalities or ethnicities.

Thank you.

Tom

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Tom O'Brien

AKC Agility Judge #92526