

The Case Against Dog Breed Discrimination by Homeowners' Insurance Companies

2 CHAPTER

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This essay was originally published in the Connecticut Insurance Law Journal (Vol. 11, No. 1, 2004–2005). The views expressed in this essay are the author's own.

In spring 2003 I moved from Virginia to Texas to begin work as a tenure-track faculty member at Texas Tech University School of Law. I brought my two dogs with me: Saffy (a four-year-old mixed breed whose parents were a fluffy red Chow Chow and a big black Labrador retriever) and Semona (a two-year-old rottweiler). Neither Semona nor Saffy has ever bitten anyone. Neither has shown any aggressive tendencies. Both are extremely playful and friendly animals.

After I placed a bid on a house in Lubbock, Texas, I began the search for homeowners' insurance—a process that I thought would be straightforward and easy. Much to my surprise, dozens of insurance companies denied my application outright. The reason? Semona is a rottweiler and Saffy is half-Chow. Rottweilers and Chow Chows are on the “blacklist” of dog breeds. Some insurance companies believe they, along with pit bulls, huskies, Doberman pinschers, and other specified breeds, are more likely to bite humans and, in turn, cause liability claims to be brought against their owners. Even mixed breeds, like my half-Chow, Saffy, are blacklisted. This practice is known by many dog owners as “breed discrimination.”

Thankfully, the story ended happily for my dogs and me. After weeks of calling nearly every insurance agent in Lubbock, I was able to obtain insurance through the Texas Farm Bureau, an organization that advocates for farmers and farming issues.¹ Had it not been for the Farm Bureau, I would have found myself on the horns of a horrible dilemma: whether to buy a home or give up my dogs. Anyone who knows me can confirm that this dilemma would have been easy to resolve; I would have chosen my furry family members over home ownership.² Sadly, however, many Americans are finding themselves in similar positions and are opting to give up their dogs to animal shelters.³

Breed discrimination by insurance companies is on the rise in the United States. Insurers are refusing to write homeowners' policies for people who own breeds that the insurance industry considers to be dangerous. Their decisions are based solely on the breed of the animal, not the individual characteristics of the particular dog. Dog bites are certainly a public health concern. However, the insurance industry's approach to the problem is based on faulty assumptions and improper use of dog-bite statistics.

The insurance industry has prejudged entire breeds of dogs as being “too risky,” instead of taking a more reasonable dog-by-dog approach to risk assessment.

Major veterinary and breed registry organizations have strongly opposed breed discrimination in insurance. Authors of scientific studies on dog bites have even argued against the use of their data to support breed-based decision-making by insurers and legislatures. Dog owners across the country have spoken out about the horrible choice they have been forced to make between obtaining insurance and keeping their dogs.

There has existed a historic tension between risk classification and social policy. Classification and insurability decisions are usually “actuarially justified”—that is, the insurance company has identified a statistical correlation between a characteristic and increased risk. Actuarial justification is frequently cited by insurers as a reason to avoid social regulation. Insurers exist to make a profit for their shareholders. They do so by minimizing risk, which, in turn, minimizes claims paid out.

Actuarial justification is only the first step in determining the social

propriety of a proposed underwriting mechanism. Social utility of the risky conduct must also be considered. Statutes across the United States are replete with examples of legislatures overruling actuarially justified practices in favor of competing social policies. “Red-lining” is a classic example. Actuaries identified statistical correlations between living in certain neighborhoods and increased risk for claims against homeowners’ policies. As a result, insurance companies began to refuse to write policies in these high-risk neighborhoods. The neighborhoods in question were often economically depressed and occupied by members of racial or ethnic minorities. Legislatures and courts stepped in to prohibit red-lining, despite the actuarial justification for the practice.⁴

Breed discrimination is a different animal altogether. Even without considering the high social utility of pet ownership, insurers have been unable to demonstrate an actuarial justification for discriminating based on breed. As the multidisciplinary Task Force on Canine Aggression and Human-Canine Interactions concluded, “[D]og bite statistics are not really statistics, and they do not give an accurate picture of dogs that bite.”⁵ The popular notion that pit bulls and rottweilers are inherently more likely to bite is simply not supported by the available statistics.

When the social utility of pets is added to the equation, breed discrimination becomes even more unreasonable. Dogs and other domesticated animals provide immeasurable joy and happiness to the families that own them. Even some components of the legal system itself have evolved to recognize pets as being more than mere chattel.⁶ In addition, the failure to obtain homeowners’ insurance is a death knell for homeownership—no insurance, no mortgage; no mortgage, no house.

My argument is quite simple: decisions regarding the provision, rating, termination, or renewal of a homeowners’ insurance policy should not be based on ownership or possession of a particular breed of dog unless there is evidence of dog-specific risk. Insurers would concededly be actuarially justified in charging higher premiums or declining coverage for people who own dogs that have unjustly bitten in the past. After all, the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Breed discrimination, as it currently stands, is not actuarially justified because scientists have not been able to accurately determine whether certain breeds are inherently more dangerous, or, instead, whether a breed’s high population is making it *appear* that the breed is more dangerous.

The consequences of breed discrimination could not be greater. Homeowners’ insurance is the gatekeeper to homeownership. Without homeowners’ insurance, a buyer cannot get a mortgage. For most Americans, if a person cannot obtain a mortgage, he cannot buy a home.

In Part I of this article, I give an overview of the problem: dog breed discrimination by insurers, as well as a related problem of breed-specific legislation by some states. In Part II, I analyze the major scientific studies on dog bites, showing that no one has adequately proven that some breeds are more inherently dangerous than others. In Part III, I show that breed discrimination and breed-specific legislation are opposed by most veterinary and animal protection groups. Part IV demonstrates that insurers have been ignoring the unique and special role that pets play in millions of American homes. I draw upon not only the profoundly personal arguments advanced by myself and others, but also the way in which the law itself is evolving by recognizing pets as more than mere property. Part V

shows how the insurance industry is a highly regulated industry that subjects itself to legislative control where, as here, the public is being harmed by underwriting decisions not driven by actuarial justification. I also offer a number of alternatives to breed discrimination.

I. Dog Breed Discrimination

Breed discrimination in insurance is a recent phenomenon that was preceded by the enactment of “breed-specific legislation” (BSL) by some state legislatures and municipalities. Both breed discrimination and BSL are a perceived response to highly publicized attacks by certain breeds, particularly pit bulls.

Highly Publicized Attacks by Pit Bulls

In the 1980s there were a number of high-profile attacks on humans by pit bulls. These attacks led to a near-hysterical reaction by members of the communities that were affected by the attacks and by the legislators who represented them.

In March 1984, pit bulls attacked Angie Hands, a nine-year-old girl in Tijeras, New Mexico.⁷ The dogs bit her right leg to the bone, ripped flesh from her arms, and tore her ear in half.⁸ The child survived but had to undergo years of reconstructive surgery.⁹ She had been attacked by her uncle’s four pit bulls in between her bus stop and her home.¹⁰ The small community of Tijeras, located outside of Albuquerque, responded with an outright ban on pit bull ownership.¹¹ Dog owners challenged the law in court, but the law was upheld as a constitutional exercise of the town’s police power.¹²

The attack on Angie Hands followed a number of other pit bull attacks around the country. A four-year-old girl was killed in Oregon City, Oregon, when she fell into a yard where a pit bull was chained.¹³ Two pit bulls mutilated their owner in Edgemere, Maryland.¹⁴ A recent, widely publicized attack in San Francisco has also brought the issue of aggressive dogs to the forefront of public attention. In January 2001, Diana Whipple was mauled to death by two Presa Canario dogs. The dogs were owned by a pair of lawyers. Evidence at the owners' murder trials showed that the dogs had tried to attack other people and animals in the past. Both defendants were convicted and served prison time.¹⁵ A subsequent civil lawsuit brought by Ms. Whipple's mother was settled out-of-court.¹⁶

“Breed-Specific Legislation”

Highly publicized pit bull attacks in the 1980s led to knee-jerk reactions by many communities.¹⁷ Attacks led to editorials, which led to public outrage, which led to swift and spontaneous legislative action that was based on neither good science nor good law. BSL began to emerge in the 1980s and early 1990s. These laws targeted specific breeds for regulation or, in some cases, outright bans. BSL is on the rise in the United States. States and municipalities across the country have considered—and, in some cases, enacted—breed-specific legislation designed to protect the public against dog bites.¹⁸ Commonly, these statutes and ordinances have banned, or placed restrictions on, pit bulls, rottweilers, Doberman pinschers, Chow Chows, German shepherds, and shar-peis.¹⁹

Ohio has aggressively targeted pit bulls for regulation. Ohio law declares any dog that “[b]elongs to

a breed that is commonly known as a pit bull dog”²⁰ is automatically a “vicious dog.”²¹ “Vicious dogs” must be penned or tied up when on their owners' premises.²² If off-premises, they must be tethered, caged, or muzzled.²³ Owners must obtain liability insurance to provide coverage in the event of a bite.²⁴

BSL has also occurred at the local municipal level. Denver passed an outright ban on the ownership, possession, keeping, control, maintenance, harboring, transportation, or sale of pit bulls.²⁵ A “pit bull” is defined as an American pit bull terrier, American Staffordshire terrier, Staffordshire bull terrier, or any dog displaying the majority of physical traits of one of those breeds.²⁶ This ordinance is in addition to Denver's “dangerous dog” ordinance that regulates “[a]ny dog with a known propensity or disposition to attack unprovoked, to cause injury or to otherwise endanger the safety of humans or other domestic animals.”²⁷ “Dangerous dogs” must be confined while at home and must be leashed and muzzled while traveling.²⁸

Not all states have followed the BSL trend. Some legislatures have prohibited BSL enacted by municipalities. Florida enacted a statute that permits localities to regulate dogs “provided that no such regulation is specific to breed.”²⁹ Some legislators have attempted, without success, to repeal this anti-BSL statute in response to several highly publicized attacks.³⁰ Minnesota also has the following prohibition against BSL:

A statutory or home rule charter city, or a county, may not adopt an ordinance regulating dangerous or potentially dangerous dogs based solely on the specific breed of the dog.³¹

Court challenges to BSL have been largely unsuccessful.³² Opponents of BSL have brought lawsuits claiming the legislation is unconstitutional because it violates due process (substantive and procedural), the Takings Clause,³³ equal protec-

tion, and the vagueness doctrine.³⁴ Plaintiffs have challenged BSL on due process grounds by arguing that there was no “rational relationship” to a legitimate legislative goal or purpose.³⁵ Courts have ruled that BSL is a rational response to a perceived problem of dog bites by certain breeds.³⁶ They have also rejected plaintiffs' arguments that the statutes and ordinances do not provide dog owners with sufficient notice and an opportunity to be heard, which are the requirements for procedural due process.³⁷ The Tijeras ordinance, for example, provides that a pit bull may be destroyed by the village only after a hearing to determine whether the dog is, in fact, a pit bull.³⁸ Plaintiffs have also contended that BSL amounts to a taking without just compensation. Courts have rejected this argument, noting that personal property is subject to regulation under the police power of a state.³⁹ Challenges based on vagueness have argued that identifying a dog's breed is difficult.⁴⁰ Most courts have found BSL to be sufficiently specific to enable a reasonable dog owner to determine if his or her dog is covered by the particular statute.⁴¹ Plaintiffs have also alleged that BSL violates equal protection by singling out pit bulls but not other breeds.⁴² Courts have noted that pit bull ownership is not a “suspect classification,” and, therefore, BSL need only have some reasonable basis to be constitutional. Courts have concluded that sufficient evidence exists to support a finding that pit bulls can be regulated by legislatures and municipalities.⁴³

One significant decision found BSL to be unconstitutional. In *American Dog Owners Association, Inc. v. City of Lynn*,⁴⁴ the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court upheld a trial court's finding that the City of Lynn's attempt to regulate pit bulls was unconstitutional.⁴⁵ The Court noted that it is particularly problematic to determine a dog's breed. The Court held,

[T]here is no scientific means,

by blood, enzyme, or otherwise, to determine whether a dog belongs to a particular breed, regardless of whether “breed” is used in a formal sense or not.⁴⁶

The Court upheld the trial court’s finding that animal-control officers had no real standards to identify pit bulls, in part because they had no training in breed identification.⁴⁷ The ordinance included a ban on mixed-breed dogs that contained “any mixture” of pit bull.⁴⁸ This provision was likewise found to be unconstitutional since it is scientifically “impossible to ascertain” whether a dog is part pit bull.⁴⁹ The ordinance was also unconstitutional because it tried to define “pit bull” as including any breed where “common understanding and usage” dictated that the dog was, in fact, a pit bull.⁵⁰ The combination of these facts led the court to conclude that the statute was too vague to pass constitutional muster.⁵¹

The Reaction of Insurers

While some communities and states have responded to dog bites with breed-specific legislation designed to regulate or outlaw certain breeds, insurance companies have also reacted to the problem of dog bites in a breed-specific manner. Dubbed “breed discrimination” by dog owners, insurance companies have started making coverage and renewal decisions based on one’s ownership of certain breeds of dog.

A Rise in Breed Discrimination

During 2003 and 2004, the media brought breed discrimination to light. The *CBS Evening News with Dan Rather* aired a story in June 2003 that featured a family that had difficulty obtaining insurance because they owned a dalmatian.⁵² The report stated, “[A]nimal

lovers have a term for what the insurance company did. They call it ‘breed discrimination’—arbitrarily punishing all dogs of certain breeds because some are vicious.”⁵³ In the months that followed, several newspaper stories discussed the prevalence of breed discrimination and documented the effects this practice has had on families.⁵⁴ These news reports replicate the experience I had in trying to get homeowners’ insurance. Multiple insurers denied coverage because of the dogs I owned. I literally could not find a carrier in the Lubbock market willing to write a policy for me until I stumbled upon the Farm Bureau on the advice of one insurance broker who sympathized with my plight.

The practice of breed discrimination produces absurd results. Consider the case of Chris and Norm Craanen of San Antonio, Texas.⁵⁵ They own a twelve-year-old dog named Bukarus. He is a rottweiler, a breed often targeted for discrimination by insurance companies. Yet, Bukarus does not pose much of a threat: he is deaf, partially blind, and has arthritis.⁵⁶ Despite his bite-free history, his owners lost their homeowners’ insurance.⁵⁷

Some of the most well-known insurers are engaging in breed discrimination.⁵⁸ Some insurers have outright bans on specific breeds,⁵⁹ while others take a more realistic and logical dog-by-dog approach. These decisions are predicated on insurers’ assessment of relative risk.⁶⁰ The “usual suspects” for breed discrimination are pit bulls, rottweilers, German shepherds, Doberman pinschers, Chow Chows, wolf hybrids, and Presa Canarios.⁶¹

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has documented an increase in the number of people being denied insurance because they own certain breeds of dog.⁶² As a result, The HSUS has started collecting data through the Internet, in the hopes of eventually convincing the insurance industry

that there are alternatives to the current practice and that it must stop.⁶³ To achieve their goal, The HSUS and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) have created a joint grass-roots campaign designed to educate the insurance industry.⁶⁴

The Insurance Industry’s Defense of Breed Discrimination

Homeowners’ insurance protects a policyholder in the event of financial loss. Most policies include two provisions, property damage and liability. Property damage provisions protect the policyholder in the event of fire, lightning, wind, water, or hail damage, theft, and vandalism. Liability provisions protect the policyholder in the event that a claim is made against a homeowner for negligence. Liability coverage typically pays for bodily injury, medical payments, and property damage that are sustained because of the negligence of the property owner.⁶⁵ Absent breed discrimination, most homeowners’ insurance policies would cover injuries due to dog bites on the premises between the amounts of \$100,000 and \$300,000.⁶⁶ In 1995 the average policyholder paid \$418 in homeowners’ insurance premiums.⁶⁷ By 2004 the average premium climbed to \$608.⁶⁸

“Insurance is a business.”⁶⁹ Insurers must make profits in order to continue in existence.⁷⁰ Companies survive by minimizing risk, which reduces the likelihood of claims. Some companies have decided that certain breeds of dog are simply “too much of a risk” to insure.⁷¹ An industry representative claims that the issue of dog bites “is a major concern for insurers.”⁷²

The industry defends its position, in part, on a series of studies from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which the industry claims as support for the proposition that certain breeds have a propensity to bite.⁷³ As I

demonstrate in Part II, however, the industry's reliance on the CDC studies is misplaced. Even the authors of the CDC studies have stated that breed discrimination is wrong and is not supported by scientific evidence.⁷⁴

The industry has also pointed to the large amount of money that has been paid out in recent years for dog-bite claims.⁷⁵ The Insurance Information Institute (III), a trade group of the insurance industry, stated that in 2002 \$345.5 million was paid out in dog-bite liability claims, up from \$250 million in 1995.⁷⁶ The group argues that dog-bite lawsuits are on the rise and juries are awarding larger claims.⁷⁷ It claims, therefore, the need to curtail its risk.

The industry's cost statistics are misleading, however. The III states, "[D]og bites now account for almost one quarter of all homeowner's insurance *liability* claims costing \$345.5 million."⁷⁸ Some perspective is in order. For every \$100 in premiums, insurers spend \$77 paying claims. Of that \$77, the overwhelming majority (\$72, or 93.5 percent) is spent on paying *property damage* claims. *Liability* claims only amount to \$5, or 6.5 percent, of total claims.⁷⁹ Even then, dog bites only constitute a percentage of that figure. Put into perspective, the money paid out in dog-bite claims is negligible when compared to the overall amount of money paid out for other types of claims. Damage due to lightning, fire, and mold all individually account for more claims payouts than all liability claims combined.⁸⁰

The insurance industry has not been consistent in the reasons for its defense of breed discrimination. One report from the III's website seems to defend breed-specific responses based on the aggregate claims paid⁸¹ and stories of several high-profile and tragic bites.⁸² However, in a statement to a newsletter of veterinary medicine,

the III defended breed discrimination on the basis that certain breeds cause more damage when and if they do bite.⁸³ Ultimately, a spokesperson for the III conceded, "[t]he industry isn't positioned to determine which dogs should be deemed vicious....[W]e're certainly not dog experts or veterinarians."⁸⁴ This, however, has not stopped many insurers from engaging in breed discrimination.

Some Exceptions to the Rule?

It appears that not all insurers have followed the breed discrimination trend. *DVM* reported that Nationwide Insurance changed its breed discrimination policy in October 2003. While Nationwide now insures all dog owners, it specifically excludes dog bites from its liability coverage.⁸⁵

State Farm's national representatives have repeatedly stated that the company does not practice breed discrimination.⁸⁶ However, when I searched for homeowners' insurance in 2003, a State Farm agent in Lubbock refused to even take my application because of the breeds I owned.

Other Instances of Breed Discrimination

There are other examples where a person's ownership of a particular breed of dog can have negative consequences. Families seeking to adopt children can face roadblocks if they own dogs that belong to certain breeds. In Massachusetts the Adoption and Foster Care Unit of the Department of Social Services will not place children in homes with certain breeds of dog.⁸⁷ The state relied upon data provided by the insurance industry when it made its decision to discriminate based on breed.⁸⁸ Some airlines also practice breed discrimination by prohibiting some dogs from flying, even though they are stored in cargo and in a closed carrier.⁸⁹

II. The Lack of Scientific Evidence

Numerous scientific studies have attempted to identify the number of annual dog bites, the dogs most likely to bite, the people most likely to be bitten, and the circumstances under which bites are most likely to occur. Such studies have not reached a uniform consensus and have left us with more questions than answers. Even the studies that have attempted to report on breeds' proclivity to bite have cautioned that their research is incomplete and should not be used to justify breed discrimination by legislatures or insurers.⁹⁰

CDC Statistics

The CDC commissioned a number of studies during the 1980s and 1990s to determine the scope and nature of the problem of dog bites in the United States.

Fatality Studies

Four separate studies attempted to chronicle the number of fatal dog bites during the periods of 1979–1988,⁹¹ 1989–1994,⁹² 1995–1996,⁹³ and 1997–1998.⁹⁴ The studies were specifically limited to fatal dog attacks because fatality statistics are easier to track.⁹⁵ Non-fatal bites were excluded from the studies, although other scientists have attempted to use emergency department reports and other sources to determine the number of nonfatal bites per year.⁹⁶

The authors combed three sets of sources in an attempt to determine the number of fatal dog bites per year. First, they searched NEXIS for news reports of dog bite-related fatalities.⁹⁷ Second, they used the National Center for Health Statistics' (NCHS) single-cause mortality tapes (SCMTs) to identify deaths where the underlying cause was listed as a dog bite.⁹⁸ Finally, the authors supplemented

these reports with information collected by The HSUS to help identify the breed of dog involved in each incident.⁹⁹ From these three sources, the authors tried to piece together the number of people who died each year in the United States from dog bites.

The authors concluded that dog bites caused approximately seven deaths per year per hundred million people.¹⁰⁰ They discerned no identifiable trend that would indicate an increase in the incidence of fatal bites over the years of the studies.¹⁰¹ During the first reporting period (1979–1988), approximately 70 percent of victims were under the age of ten.¹⁰² Males, under the age of twenty-nine, were more likely than females to be victims.¹⁰³ These findings as to age and gender were consistent throughout the study periods.

Many of the fatal bites of children involved horrific attacks on the very young. A three-week-old girl was killed in her crib by the family's Chow Chow.¹⁰⁴ A two-year-old boy in South Dakota wandered into a neighbor's yard, where he was attacked and killed by two German shepherd-wolf hybrids.¹⁰⁵ The elderly were also victims of several fatal attacks. In March 1996 two rottweilers killed an eighty-six-year-old Tennessee woman. One month before the assault, the dogs had attacked and injured the same woman.¹⁰⁶

In the twenty-year period of the CDC studies, the breed responsible for the most number of bites has changed.¹⁰⁷ From 1979 to 1980, Great Danes caused the most number of fatalities, with three deaths for the period. However, four breeds were tied with two deaths each: pit bulls, rottweilers, huskies, and malamutes.¹⁰⁸ In 1981 pit bulls took over as the breed with the most number of fatal bites.¹⁰⁹ Pit bulls remained in that position until 1993, when rottweilers began causing approximately ten fatal bites per two-year reporting period.¹¹⁰ The last available report-

ing period, 1997–1998, shows that rottweilers caused ten fatal bites per two-year period, while pit bulls caused six, and Saint Bernards caused three.¹¹¹ During the twenty-year study, ninety deaths were excluded because the breed was “unavailable.”¹¹²

The authors of the CDC studies acknowledged that the methods they used in their studies had a number of limitations. NEXIS, they pointed out, was not designed for scientific research. News reports would only be flagged if their text contained certain keywords.¹¹³ Further, reliance on NEXIS assumes that newspapers accurately reported the breed of dog involved in a particular attack.¹¹⁴ SCMTs have a one- to two-year lag time, which means that some fatalities may have been missed.¹¹⁵ The authors believed that, on average, their methods only uncovered approximately 74 percent of dog-bite-related fatalities.¹¹⁶

Even if one accepts the CDC statistics as definitive on the subject, they have a number of other limitations in answering the question of whether certain breeds are more dangerous than others. First, the studies were limited to fatal dog attacks.¹¹⁷ Second, the breed of the dog could not be accurately determined in every case.¹¹⁸ Finally, the number of fatal attacks per year is so low that it is problematic to statistically extrapolate conclusions from the data. For example, in the first two years of the study (1979–1980), Great Danes accounted for the most number of fatal bites (three).¹¹⁹ Four breeds, however, followed closely behind with two fatal bites each (pit bull, German shepherd, husky, and malamute).¹²⁰ It would be statistically questionable to conclude that Great Danes were inherently more dangerous than the other breeds, based on a net difference of only one fatality.

Nonfatality Studies

The CDC fatality studies acknowledged that, while death rates for dog bites do not appear to have increased over time,¹²¹ nonfatal bites were becoming more of a public health problem.¹²² The CDC conducted a study of nonfatal dog bites in 2001.¹²³ The study used data from the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System-All Injury Program (NEISS-AIP) to identify the number of nonfatal dog bites during the 2001 calendar year. NEISS-AIP collects data from initial visits to emergency departments (EDs) across the country.¹²⁴ NEISS-AIP data are drawn from a nationally representative sample of NEISS hospitals.¹²⁵ The CDC analyzed every case where “dog bite” was listed as the external cause of injury.¹²⁶

In total, NEISS-AIP data revealed that hospital EDs treated 6,106 patients for dog-bite-related injuries during 2001.¹²⁷ Since the NEISS-AIP data did not include every hospital in the nation, the authors used these data to extrapolate to the general population.¹²⁸ They estimated that 368,245 people were treated for dog-bite-related injuries in 2001.¹²⁹ The largest cohort of victims was children between the ages of five and nine.¹³⁰ Boys, under the age of fourteen, were more likely than girls to be seen in EDs for dog-bite-related injuries.¹³¹

The NEISS-AIP data included narratives for many of the attacks. One case involved a four-year-old who was bitten by a dog guarding her puppies.¹³² Another involved a three-year-old girl who was bitten when she tried to take away a dog's food.¹³³ A thirty-four-year-old man was bitten while trying to break up a dogfight. Some victims were bitten by their own dogs. A twenty-seven-year-old woman was bitten by her dog after he had been hit by a car and became dis-

oriented.¹³⁴ A seventy-five-year-old woman was attacked while trying to prevent her dog from biting an emergency medical technician (EMT) who was attempting to put the woman in an ambulance.¹³⁵

The *Morbidity and Mortality* report describing the study does not document the number of attacks per breed. This is likely due to the fact that the ED reports did not specify the breed of dog. An attempt to determine the number of bites per breed would depend on victims accurately self-reporting the breed of the attacking dog.¹³⁶

The study had a number of limitations. First, the authors excluded fatal dog bites. Second, the study only examined cases where the victim sought treatment in an ED. Victims may have gone to other health care providers, such as private physicians or urgent-care centers. Third, 26 percent of reports were missing an injury diagnosis. Many cases had limited data on the circumstances of the attack or the identity of the dog involved.¹³⁷ Thus, the CDC's estimates may be both overinclusive ("just cause" bites may have been included)¹³⁸ and underinclusive (insofar as victims may have sought treatment at other facilities).

Another CDC study attempted to identify the incidence of dog bites in a particular locality: Denver, Colorado.¹³⁹ The authors examined reports from the Denver Municipal Animal Shelter in 1991.¹⁴⁰ There were a total of 991 bites during the study period.¹⁴¹ However, only 178 were eligible for the study,¹⁴² as the authors excluded several categories of bites: bites involving household members, attacks involving multiple dogs, attacks before 1991, dogs who had been owned for less than six months, cases in which the owner did not live in Denver County, attacks where the owner's phone number was not listed on the report, and cases in which the victim did not receive medical treatment.¹⁴³

The study created a control group of dogs to try to determine whether certain characteristics (such as breed) made a dog more likely to bite.¹⁴⁴ Using a multivariate statistical analysis, the study concluded that biting dogs were more likely than control dogs to be German shepherds or Chow Chows, male, intact (not neutered), and reside in a house with one or more children.¹⁴⁵ Denver had (and still has) a ban on pit bulls, so it is not surprising that no cases involved that breed.¹⁴⁶

The authors acknowledged that their results had several problems. First, they were only able to speak to owners of approximately half of the biting dogs. They excluded cases in which the victim did not seek medical attention. In this respect, the authors believed that seeking medical attention was a "surrogate" for "real bites."¹⁴⁷ The authors did not verify the breeds of the dogs involved, but, instead, "identified predominant breed as whatever breed the owner considered the dog."¹⁴⁸ Because of the small number of bites per breed, the authors could not assess the statistical significance of breeds other than German shepherd and Chow Chow.¹⁴⁹

Another CDC study attempted to determine the frequency of dog bites by conducting a random telephone survey of households.¹⁵⁰ The authors used the Injury Control and Risk Survey (ICARIS), a random-digit-dialing telephone survey.¹⁵¹ They asked each adult respondent whether he (or his children) had been bitten by a dog in the previous twelve months and whether the victim had sought medical attention.¹⁵² Out of 5,328 completed interviews, ninety-four adults and ninety-two children reported being bitten in the previous twelve months.¹⁵³ Of these, twelve adults and twenty-six children sought medical care.¹⁵⁴ From these data, the authors extrapolated that 1.8 percent of the American population

(4,494,083 people) had been bitten in the previous twelve months, and 0.3 percent had sought medical attention.¹⁵⁵ This shows that nonfatal bites are a public health problem that "is five orders of magnitude greater" than fatal dog bites.¹⁵⁶ The study concluded that several factors had no statistical significance on the likelihood of being bitten: census region, urbanicity, race/ethnic group, and household income.¹⁵⁷ The study did not attempt to correlate between the number of bites and the breed of dog. The authors acknowledged that the study relied on the self-reporting of data, which were not validated, and that they received a poor response rate (only 56 percent of people responded to the survey).¹⁵⁸

Other Studies

Other studies have attempted to document the total number of dog bites and the number of bites per breed.

A study of ED visits for dog-bite injuries¹⁵⁹ confirmed many of the conclusions of the previously discussed CDC study of ED visits.¹⁶⁰ The study noted that a lack of a national reporting system for dog-bite injuries makes gathering and analyzing data on the subject difficult.¹⁶¹ The authors, in reviewing the literature on the subject, found that previous studies concluded that between 0.3 percent and 1.1 percent of all ED visits are due to dog-bite-related injuries.¹⁶² To determine the true percentage, they collected data from the National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey (NHAMCS), a random surveying instrument that is used to calculate the number of ED visits per year.¹⁶³ They estimated that between 1992 and 1994, 333,687 annual visits were made to EDs seeking medical treatment for dog-bite-related injuries.¹⁶⁴ This amounted to 0.4 percent of all ED visits nationwide.¹⁶⁵ Looking at the monetary cost of dog bites, they found that

the average cost for a dog-bite-related ED visit was \$274, resulting in an annual cost of \$102.4 million.¹⁶⁶ The study, however, did not address the question of whether certain breeds are particularly more dangerous than others. This is partly due to the unavailability of data through NHAMCS. Moreover, the study most likely undercounted the number of non-fatal dog bites because victims may have sought treatment from places other than EDs.¹⁶⁷

Other studies have attempted to examine the problem at a more localized level. A July 1991 study¹⁶⁸ found that dog bites were responsible for 0.3 percent of all ED visits at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.¹⁶⁹ Of those visits, 77 percent involved cases where the victim knew the biting dog.¹⁷⁰ The study found one statistically significant conclusion: more pit bull injuries were the result of unprovoked attacks as compared to such attacks by other breeds.¹⁷¹ "Unfortunately, the absence of reliable dog breed-specific population figures prevent[ed] the calculation of breed-specific injury rates."¹⁷²

An October 1997 study tried to determine the number of dog bites in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh), by using the "capture-recapture" method of statistical analysis.¹⁷³ The authors found that 790 dog bites were reported to the Allegheny County Health Department in 1993.¹⁷⁴ Using the capture-recapture method, along with log-linear modeling, the study concluded that the number of unreported dog bites was 1,388 (with a 95 percent confidence interval of between 1,010 and 1,925).¹⁷⁵ The authors cautioned, however, that the self-reporting sources are problematic in that "whether or not a case is reported depends largely on the severity of the event and the attitude, knowledge, or education level of the victim."¹⁷⁶ Accordingly, the authors suggested that the actual Pittsburgh dog-bite inci-

dence rate must be higher than that found in the study.¹⁷⁷

Another survey¹⁷⁸ in Pennsylvania polled children in order to determine an overall bite rate from the perspective of bite victims.¹⁷⁹ The survey, conducted in 1981, found that 46.1 percent of children reported that they had been bitten by a dog during their lifetime.¹⁸⁰ The study concluded that

[B]eing bitten by a dog is a rather common occurrence for children, especially those between the ages of seven and twelve years, and the event is greatly underestimated by official bite statistics.¹⁸¹

Nevertheless, the authors did not attempt to catalog bites per breed.¹⁸²

Unfortunately, not all scientists have used statistically sound methods to draw conclusions about the relative dangerousness of breeds. Two physicians, Lee E. Pinckney and Leslie A. Kennedy, from the Department of Radiology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School and Children's Medical Center, sent letters to the editors of 245 major newspapers requesting copies of all stories about dog-bite-related fatalities.¹⁸³ The number of fatalities reported by the responding newspapers between March 1966 and June 1980 totaled seventy-four.¹⁸⁴ Of the seventy-four fatalities, sixteen were caused by German shepherds, nine by huskies, eight by Saint Bernards, six each by bull terriers and Great Danes, and five by malamutes.¹⁸⁵ The remaining dog-bite fatalities were caused by a variety of breeds, including ten attacks by mixed breeds and five attacks by dogs of unknown breeds.¹⁸⁶ In addition to acquiring bite fatality statistics from newspapers, the authors used American Kennel Club (AKC) registration data to compare the relative number of fatalities per breed.¹⁸⁷

The CDC authors criticized the Pinckney/Kennedy study as being "primarily anecdotal" rather than

"systematic" in its approach.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, Pinckney and Kennedy conceded that their database was "incomplete" and "may not be entirely reliable."¹⁸⁹ Their data depended on newspaper reports, which may themselves be incomplete or inaccurate. Thus, the authors said their data required "cautious interpretation."¹⁹⁰ An example of such "cautious interpretation" is represented by the authors' observation that even though German shepherds were involved in more fatalities than any other breed in the study, such large frequency could be reflective of the fact that German shepherds had the highest AKC registration of any large breed.¹⁹¹ Hence, the use of AKC data to draw comparisons between breeds is problematic,¹⁹² as demonstrated by the high number of registrations for breeds such as German shepherds, and low number of registrations for a popular breed, such as the pit bull.¹⁹³

William Winkler's study¹⁹⁴ in 1977 has also been criticized for its lack of scientific method.¹⁹⁵ His "study" involved compiling news reports from eleven dog-bite-related fatalities from January 1974 through December 1975.¹⁹⁶ From these data, he made various conclusions about the breeds responsible, finding that, "not unexpectedly," German shepherds were the breed most often responsible for fatal dog attacks.¹⁹⁷ Because Saint Bernards were responsible for two deaths during this twenty-four-month period, he concluded, "[t]his relatively uncommon breed may be a greater hazard than others."¹⁹⁸

A common thread running through several studies is the attempt to extrapolate conclusions about breeds based on limited data. For example, an April 2000 epidemiological study in Philadelphia used reports from the Department of Health to conclude that between 1995 and 1997 there were approximately 5,390 bites.¹⁹⁹ The

authors concluded that pit bulls, German shepherds, and rottweilers combined were responsible for 59 percent of bites each year.²⁰⁰ The authors felt comfortable drawing this conclusion despite the fact that they could not determine the breed in 74 percent of cases.²⁰¹

The Unknown Origin of Aggressiveness

Despite all of the research and studies on the subject, scientists and veterinarians cannot state with certainty or confidence why certain dogs are more aggressive than others.²⁰² It seems that a particular dog may be aggressive because of a variety of factors.²⁰³ According to the American Veterinary Medical Association's multidisciplinary Task Force on Canine Aggression and Human-Canine Interactions, "A dog's tendency to bite depends on at least five interacting factors: heredity, early experience, later socialization and training, health (medical and behavioral), and victim behavior."²⁰⁴

While breed (as an inherited characteristic) is one component of predicting a dog's dangerousness, it is not the only factor.²⁰⁵ There is no way to scientifically determine whether a dog is likely to bite in the future, any more than psychologists can predict whether certain people will commit crimes of violence. The exception to this rule is the axiom that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. For this reason, many veterinary and scientific groups support "dangerous dog laws" that target individual dogs who have demonstrated a propensity to bite or attack innocent victims.²⁰⁶ The problem with BSL and breed discrimination is that legislatures and insurers have attempted to prophylactically determine which breeds are most likely

to bite without any evidence of individual dangerousness.

Numerators and Denominators in Dog-Bite Statistics

To date, no scientific study has been able to resolve what I term to be the problem of "numerators and denominators." A person wishing to determine whether certain breeds are more likely to bite than others must first determine the number of bites per breed (the numerator) and then compare that number to the total number of dogs of that breed in the general population (the denominator). This can be expressed as a ratio:

$$\text{Relative Dangerousness Ratio} = \frac{\text{Number of Bites by Breed}}{\text{Total Population of Breed}}$$

This ratio (RDR) allows for a comparison between breeds. The higher the RDR, the greater proclivity a particular breed has to bite. It allows for a comparison of "oranges to oranges" and "apples to apples." Otherwise, it is likely that highly popular breeds will appear to be more dangerous, when in fact the number of bites is reflective of the overall population of the particular breed.

A study that tried to extrapolate breed data from the previously discussed CDC studies agreed that the proper method for determining a breed's dangerousness was the use of a comparative ratio:

Ideally, breed-specific bite rates would be calculated to compare breed and quantify the relative dangerousness of each breed. For example, 10 fatal attacks by Breed X relative to a population of 10,000 X's (1/1,000) imply a greater risk than 100 attacks by Breed Y relative to a population of 1,000,000 Y's (0.1/1,000). Without consideration of the

population sizes, Breed Y would be perceived to be the more dangerous breed on the basis of the number of fatalities.²⁰⁷

Using the RDR normalizes the effect of a breed's popularity, or lack thereof. Dogs of popular breeds are going to bite more often simply because there are more of them.²⁰⁸ A January 1997 article warned that, as dalmatians become more popular, people should expect to see more bites from that breed.²⁰⁹ This is not to say that dalmatians are inherently more dangerous than other breeds. Rather, an increase in their population should also result in a proportional increase in bites from that breed.²¹⁰ Similarly, the Pinckney/Kennedy study²¹¹ cautioned that, despite the fact that German shepherds accounted for the most number of deaths, their finding must be read in conjunction with the popularity of the breed, as evidenced by AKC registrations of the same time period.²¹²

The problem of numerators and denominators is that it is difficult—if not impossible—to accurately determine the number of bites per breed and the number of dogs in a particular breed. Without an accurate count for either the numerator or denominator, one runs the risk of stigmatizing an entire breed as "overly dangerous" based on the breed's *absolute* number of bites, instead of examining the breed's number of bites relative to its *overall population*.

The Numerator Problem

The principal problem in determining the total number of bites by a particular breed is that there is no national reporting system for dog bites.²¹³ The CDC studies²¹⁴ demonstrate that, while fatal dog bites are easier to track than nonfatal bites, even the methodology used to uncover fatalities misses approximately 26 percent of cases.²¹⁵ Further, news accounts—on which the CDC relied, in part, to deter-

mine the number of fatal dog bites and the breeds involved—may be biased toward reporting attacks by certain breeds.²¹⁶

The numerator may also be biased against dogs who cause more damage, while ignoring breeds that bite more often but do not cause victims to seek emergency treatment.²¹⁷ If a dog bite does not cause serious injury, it is not likely that the victim would seek medical treatment.²¹⁸ This then skews the results of studies that use emergency department visits to track the incidence of dog bites.²¹⁹ “The problem with self-reporting sources is that whether or not a case is reported depends largely on the severity of the event and the attitude, knowledge, or education level of the victim.”²²⁰ Studies that have used random sampling²²¹ are equally problematic because they, too, depend on accurate self-reporting of their sample groups. The low response rates of these studies also lead to questions about the accuracy of the results that are extrapolated to the general population.²²²

The Denominator Problem

No one knows how many dogs are present in the United States at any one time. This should not be surprising, as even the constitutionally mandated²²³ decennial census of human beings is known to undercount people.²²⁴

Determining the true number, or even an accurate estimate, of dogs can be problematic. While many dogs are kept as household pets,²²⁵ others are used as service animals or guard dogs; kept in animal shelters or animal stores; or simply allowed to wander the streets as strays. The dog population is constantly changing and moving, which makes obtaining an accurate count difficult and expensive.

Even if it was possible to determine how many dogs exist in the country at any one time, the prob-

lem then becomes how to determine how many of those dogs belong to each breed. Determining the breed of one dog is difficult enough.²²⁶ To take a census of all dogs and identify their breeds would be an impossible task.

Some scientists have suggested using AKC or municipal registration data to determine the number of dogs in a particular breed in a particular community.²²⁷ However, one study concluded that city registrations account for only 29.1 percent of all dogs.²²⁸ Further, owners of breeds considered “dangerous” may be reluctant to register their animals.²²⁹ This may be particularly true of dogs used for illicit purposes, such as those owned by drug dealers, dogfighters, and gang members.²³⁰

AKC registration data is also problematic because the AKC only registers purebred dogs²³¹ and depends on owners taking the initiative to register their dogs.²³² Mixed breeds, for which there are numerous combinations, are not eligible for registration.²³³ Pit bulls are often registered with organizations other than the AKC. If owners do register them, they register with the United Kennel Club or the American Dog Breeders Association.²³⁴ If a breed is undercounted in the denominator of the ratio, it will make a breed appear more dangerous than it actually is.²³⁵

The Problem of Breeds

Breed is a human construct that is used to conveniently group dogs based on similar physical characteristics.²³⁶ There is no scientific test to determine a dog’s breed.²³⁷ The only way to determine a dog’s breed is to examine its heredity. This task is made possible but is expensive and time-consuming,²³⁸ if a dog is registered with the AKC.²³⁹

As examples of the problem of defining and identifying breed, consider the case of huskies and

pit bulls. “Husky” refers to a class of dogs, not any one particular breed. Siberian huskies, Alaskan malamutes, and Samoyeds are all considered to belong to the “husky” family, yet they are all different breeds.²⁴⁰ Similarly, there is no AKC-standard breed called “pit bull.” “Pit bull” is a collective classification of the American Staffordshire terrier, Staffordshire pit bull terrier, and bull terrier.²⁴¹

Scientists have not been able to determine if victims of dog bites can accurately report the breeds of dogs that attacked them. Many scientists, particularly the CDC authors, have stated that misidentification is a likely problem, especially under the stress of a dog attack.²⁴² Part of the problem may be that as a particular breed gets a reputation for dangerousness, some victims jump to the conclusion that they were bitten by a dog of that breed.²⁴³

Even under ordinary, low-stress conditions, many people have difficulty identifying a dog’s breed.

For the average person anything with prick ears and blue eyes automatically becomes a “husky”....Any smooth coated brown dog, medium sized, and muscular becomes a “pit bull”....Any tall dog becomes a Great Dane, fuzzy or hairy, and it’s a Chow Chow. If it’s black and tan and heavy, it’s a rottweiler, etc.²⁴⁴

One survey of bite reports found that medium-size black and tan animals were likely to be recorded as German shepherds. Stocky, short-haired dogs were listed as pit bulls. Media reports of pit bull attacks are often accompanied by pictures of boxers or pugs instead of American Staffordshire terriers.²⁴⁵ One entertaining website, called “Find the pit bull,” displays twenty-one pictures of purebred dogs and challenges the user to identify the pit bull among them.²⁴⁶

Even veterinarians and other experts have difficulty determining

whether a particular dog belongs to a particular breed.²⁴⁷ This was a central concern of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court in *American Dog Owners Association v. City of Lynn*.²⁴⁸ The Court declared the city of Lynn's pit bull ordinance to be unconstitutional in part because the animal-control officers designated to enforce the ordinance used conflicting and subjective standards to determine and identify breed.²⁴⁹

The problem of mixed breed complicates the issue even further. In determining a relative dangerousness ratio, it is unclear how to count mixed breeds.²⁵⁰ Should they be counted once per breed? Not at all? Create a new category for each possible combination of breeds? Aside from how to use the raw data on attacks by mixed breed, there is the additional problem of misidentification by laypeople.²⁵¹ Victims sometimes inadvertently report mixed-breed dogs as purebreds²⁵² due to the heat of the moment and their lack of training in identifying subtle breed characteristics.

There is good reason to believe that the raw data being used to calculate relative dangerousness ratios are incomplete and inaccurate. If the data being input into the calculation are flawed, the results (claiming to show some breeds are more dangerous than others) are equally flawed.²⁵³

The Problem of “Just Cause” Bites

Even if an accurate count could be obtained of the number of bites per breed, there is the additional problem of how to handle “just cause” bites in the resulting statistics. If the purpose is to determine which breeds are *inherently* more dangerous, just by virtue of the breeds themselves, then the statistics should exclude bites by the dog that were justified. If a rottweiler bites an intruder who is attacking the homeowner, we would expect the

rottweiler to be praised for defending its owner. This is not the type of bite that we should be trying to prevent. It is also not the type of bite that is likely to lead to an insurance claim. Similarly, if a dog is being physically tormented by a neighborhood child who is poking it in the eye, we would not deny that the dog has an inherent right to defend itself by growling, snarling, barking, or biting back.²⁵⁴ These are “just cause” bites, bites in which the dog has a legitimate reason to defend itself or its owners.

It is possible that the statistics are being skewed because property owners who wish to purchase “guard dogs” may be self-selecting certain breeds based on the popular notions of relative dangerousness. Guard dogs are trained to protect property by scaring away would-be intruders and, if necessary, to bite an actual trespasser. Owners who desire to have guard dogs may rationalize the purchase of one breed over another based on the degree to which *they subjectively believe* that the dog will be “mean” or “scary.” This creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. The “scarier” a breed is considered by a community, the more likely a dog of that breed will be purchased for protection, used for protection, and actually bite an intruder. This will skew the statistics in a way that purports to show that the particular breed is, in fact, inherently more dangerous.

Despite these concerns, it appears that the studies to date have not excluded this category of bites from their datasets.²⁵⁵ This is a fatal flaw in the statistics, for it confuses the issue between *inherent* dangerousness (due to breed) and legitimate animal behavior.

Breed Switching by Bad Owners

Assume for the moment that an accurate relative dangerousness ratio could be determined for each

breed, and that it could be scientifically determined that certain breeds are inherently more dangerous than others. What about the owners? Does this not excuse them from the responsibility to properly train and care for their pets?

The reality is that there is a wide spectrum of responsible pet ownership. For some people, occasionally providing food and water for a dog is considered sufficient. On the opposite end of the spectrum, some people spend thousands of dollars on luxuries such as pet spas, advanced dog agility classes, and elaborate beds. Somewhere in the middle of the spectrum are people who actively ensure that their pets have food, water, and shelter; get exercise; are well trained; and receive adequate veterinary care.²⁵⁶

Unfortunately, a small percentage of pet owners breed and use their pets for illicit purposes. They intentionally seek out vicious dogs who will attack and maim humans and other animals.²⁵⁷ Dogfighting enthusiasts, gang members, and drug dealers will purposely select, breed, and train dogs to be vicious. The purpose may be to intimidate rivals (in the case of gangs and drug dealers), to defend illegal drugs (in the case of drug dealers), or to make money (in the case of promoters of dogfights).²⁵⁸ For some, having a vicious dog is simply a status symbol.²⁵⁹ In order to make dogs into vicious weapons, they use “revolting and painful techniques to bring the animals to the verge of bloodlust.”²⁶⁰ Drug dealers in Philadelphia during the 1980s had pit bulls named “Murder, Hitler, and Scarface.”²⁶¹ They wore collars that concealed crack, cocaine, and money.²⁶² In Chicago, gang members “brandish[ed] their fierce pit bulls just as they would a switchblade or a gun.”²⁶³

Current statistics do not take into consideration the degree to which the source of a dog's aggressiveness is the torturous upbringing

described above, as opposed to the dog's breed.²⁶⁴ In those situations, the problem is clearly with the dog owner—not the dog itself or its breed. These problem owners are dangerous with any breed of dog.²⁶⁵

One solution would be for insurers to write policies that exclude injuries related to dogfighting. This would limit the claims paid out for these high-risk animals, yet it would leave potential plaintiffs without an adequate source of compensation. This result might be a socially acceptable solution because of the unclean hands of the “victims.” If dogfighting exclusions are incorporated into standard homeowners' insurance contracts, the language should be narrowly written to exclude only those bad faith actors who, as a matter of social policy, should not be rewarded or compensated for injuries attendant to an illegal activity. The key would be to write language that would still protect innocent passersby.

One of the arguments against BSL is that once a breed becomes banned, problem owners will simply switch to another breed.²⁶⁶ In the 1930s, pit bulls were far from considered a “vicious breed.” In fact, a pit bull named “Pete” starred in the *Our Gang* films of the time.²⁶⁷ Fifty years ago the Doberman was considered the most vicious dog.²⁶⁸ During the 1980s the focus turned to pit bulls.²⁶⁹ In short, today's public target may be tomorrow's favorite pet, and vice versa.

Do the Insurance Companies Have Better Data?

It is quite possible that one or more insurance companies have their own proprietary data purporting to show that one breed or another is disproportionately responsible for bites. I am skeptical that their data would be any better than the CDC's. The problems

associated with the CDC and non-CDC studies are inherent to the problem of trying to determine the number of bites per breed and the number of dogs per breed.

III. The Widespread Opposition to Breed Discrimination

Breed discrimination by insurance companies and breed-specific legislation by state and local governments have attracted national attention and outrage by veterinarians, animal groups, and dog owners.

The American Veterinary Medical Association's Task Force on Canine Aggression concluded that BSL and other breed-specific actions are “inappropriate and ineffective.”²⁷⁰ The Task Force consisted of a diverse coalition of veterinarians, academics, physicians, insurers, representatives from animal rights advocates, CDC scientists, and lawyers.²⁷¹ The Task Force agreed that to properly determine the relative dangerousness of breeds, one must first determine the number of bites per breed and the total population of each breed. As noted above,²⁷² the accurate calculation of both numbers is an immense challenge.²⁷³

The Task Force rejected the notion that a dog's breed is the sole determinant of dangerousness. “[A] dog's tendency to bite depends on at least five interacting factors: heredity, early experience, later socialization and training, health (medical and behavioral), and victim behavior.”²⁷⁴ They also pointed to the problems of mixed breeds, misidentification of breeds, and shifting popularity of breeds.²⁷⁵ The Task Force also expressed concern about making decisions based solely on breed, since there is a lack of scientific means to identify breed.²⁷⁶ The Task Force recommended, instead, that local

governments focus on individual dogs and dog owners.²⁷⁷

The very scientists who have authored studies trying to determine a link between breed and aggressiveness oppose breed discrimination and BSL. In many of the CDC studies, the scientists cautioned against using their incomplete data on attacks to make knee-jerk legislative or policy decisions based solely on breed.²⁷⁸ They pointed to the lack of reliable data on bites per breed (the “numerator problem”) and the absence of a reliable count of dogs per breed (the “denominator problem”).²⁷⁹

Animal groups have also opposed BSL and breed discrimination. The AKC has taken a strong stance against breed discrimination by insurance companies:

The American Kennel Club believes that insurance companies should determine coverage of a dog-owning household based on the dog's deeds, not the dog's breeds. If a dog is a well-behaved member of the household and the community, there is no reason to deny or cancel coverage. In fact, insurance companies should consider a dog an asset, a natural alarm system whose bark may deter intruders and prevent potential theft.²⁸⁰

The AKC also issued this statement concerning BSL:

The American Kennel Club (AKC) strongly supports dangerous-dog control. Dog-control legislation must be reasonable, non-discriminatory, and enforceable as detailed in the AKC Position Statement.

To provide communities with the most effective dangerous-dog control possible, laws must not be breed specific. Instead of holding all dog owners accountable for their behavior, breed specific laws place restrictions only on the owners of certain breeds of

dogs. If specific breeds are banned, owners of these breeds intent on using their dogs for malicious purposes, such as dog fighting or criminal activities, will simply change to another breed of dog and continue to jeopardize public safety.²⁸¹

In response to a perceived rise in breed discrimination, The HSUS and the ASPCA developed a grassroots campaign to educate the insurance industry.²⁸² Both groups oppose breed discrimination.²⁸³ Other groups that have spoken out against breed discrimination include the American Veterinary Medical Association, the American Dog Owners Association, the Westminster Kennel Club, and the American Humane Association.²⁸⁴

IV. The Unique and Special Role of Pets in Society

For at least twelve thousand years, the history of the domestic dog, *Canis familiaris*, has been intertwined with that of human beings.²⁸⁵ The law has generally treated dogs as mere property²⁸⁶—or worse, as nonproperty.²⁸⁷ As the popularity of dogs as pets has grown, the law has responded in kind by recognizing the importance of dogs, cats, and other pets. The insurance industry, by practicing breed discrimination, has failed to appreciate the unique and special role of dogs to their owners and to society. This section is offered to provide some context for the implications of breed discrimination. This is a problem that has the potential for affecting a large segment of the population and for having damaging effects on the mental, physical, and emotional health of people.

The Growing Popularity of Pets

Population

A study estimated that in 1998 there would be 53.6 million dogs in the United States, a 2.1 percent increase since 1991.²⁸⁸ Approximately 34.3 percent of homes have one or more dogs.²⁸⁹ Dog owners are thus a significant portion of the United States population. They are also a significant pool of customers (actual and potential) for insurers.

Spending

To understand the scope and power of the pet-owning population, consider the amount of money that is spent on pets each year. In 1998, Americans spent \$11.1 billion on veterinary care alone, a 61 percent increase from 1991.²⁹⁰ There are more than 35 “pet vacation resorts” where dogs and cats can go to be pampered.²⁹¹ There are also more than 650 pet cemeteries in the United States, indicating the extent to which owners will go to memorialize their pets.²⁹²

Dogs: Members of the American Family

Breed discrimination ignores the reality that most pet owners consider their pets to be members of their immediate family.²⁹³ Indeed, this “coexistence has contributed substantially to humans’ quality of life.”²⁹⁴ Dogs were initially domesticated to be work animals, assisting humans with farming, herding livestock, and providing security at night.²⁹⁵ In time, dogs became “four-legged members of the family.”²⁹⁶ Some dogs provide assistance to humans with disabilities.²⁹⁷ Service dogs serve as a tangible resource for people, not just a source of companionship.²⁹⁸

Dogs can have positive effects on the health of their owners,²⁹⁹ such as alleviating loneliness and de-

pression, reducing high blood pressure, and addressing obesity.³⁰⁰ On the other hand, these effects must be balanced against the negative health effects of dogs, such as bites and the transmission of zoonotic diseases.³⁰¹ When the positives are weighed against the negatives, at least one physician has concluded that dogs probably are beneficial to human health.³⁰² Some owners will forgo their own health in order to care for their pets—a demonstration of how much pets mean to some owners. “Most physicians are familiar with at least one example of a person refusing hospitalization...because there was no one else in the home to care for their pet.”³⁰³

The loss of a pet can have profound effects on an owner. A number of organizations provide bereavement support for people whose pets have died,³⁰⁴ and at least three greeting card companies make sympathy cards specifically for the loss of a pet.³⁰⁵

Breed discrimination forces pet owners to choose between their homes and their dogs. Forcing owners to make this choice represents a significant misunderstanding of the role of pets in our society. For some pet owners, giving up a pet is like losing a child, sibling, or spouse.

The Consequences of Breed Discrimination

When a dog bites, it can have lasting consequences for both the dog and its owner’s family. When an insurance company refuses to insure or renew a household based on a particular breed of dog, it, too, can have far-reaching consequences.

Most people do not respond appropriately if their dog bites someone. Most punishment is too severe and too late to be of any value to the dog in preventing future occurrences.³⁰⁶ The dog is

usually isolated from the family and visitors. By limiting interaction with humans, the dog does not learn how to deal with people appropriately.³⁰⁷ Isolation may also lead to inadequate medical care, which may in turn lead to serious health problems for the dog.³⁰⁸

Some owners abandon their dogs or euthanize them either out of frustration at not being able to correct aggressive behavior or because an insurance company tells them to do so in order to get homeowners' insurance.³⁰⁹ When BSL goes into effect or insurance companies discriminate, it causes some owners to purposely assume a sheltered and low profile in the community to avoid being caught with an unauthorized pet.³¹⁰ Shelter drop-offs are common after BSL goes into effect or insurers begin to discriminate based on breed.³¹¹ The humane society in Atchison, Kansas, reported a 40 percent increase in drop-offs of rottweilers because of breed discrimination.³¹² This is unfortunate because many shelters can only keep dogs a certain number of days before euthanizing them. Breed discrimination can have a chilling effect on ownership of certain breeds,³¹³ which means certain breeds are not likely to be adopted and will have to be euthanized.

Breed discrimination will likely have an effect on homeownership in states that permit this practice. Homeowners' insurance is the "gatekeeper" to homeownership. Without homeowners' insurance, a person cannot get a mortgage. Without a mortgage, most people cannot buy a house.³¹⁴ An insured who chooses to lie about a dog's breed or the existence of a dog altogether is committing policy fraud, running the risk of criminal prosecution³¹⁵ and the complete cancellation of his or her policy.³¹⁶

Pets: More than Mere Property

The problem of breed discrimination should be viewed in light of modern developments in animal law, which is beginning to recognize that animals are more than mere property. Until recently, the legal status of animals was governed by an 1897 Supreme Court case, *Sentell v. New Orleans & C.R. Co.*³¹⁷ The case involved a Newfoundland named Countess Lona who was killed by a railroad car.³¹⁸ Her owner brought suit against the railroad for negligence. The railroad defended by relying on a statute that prohibited an owner from recovering for more than the declared value on the animal's registration form.³¹⁹ An owner whose dog was not registered could not recover anything for the loss of or damage to the animal.³²⁰ Countess Lona's owner brought suit, challenging the constitutionality of the law.³²¹

The Supreme Court held that the statute was constitutional as a valid exercise of the state's police power.³²² The Court declared that dogs are a form of quasi-property that is "imperfect or qualified" in nature.³²³ The Court relied on the common law rule that dogs could not constitute stolen property for purposes of larceny statutes.³²⁴ The common law held that wild animals had no property value until killed or subdued.³²⁵ Domesticated animals, such as horses, cattle, sheep, and other "work" animals, were considered "perfect and complete" property.³²⁶ Dogs fell in a third category, that of "cats, monkeys, parrots, singing birds, and similar animals, kept for pleasure, curiosity, or caprice."³²⁷ The Court saw no useful, social value for dogs, except for companionship, which the Court dismissed as unsatisfactory for the establishment of a property interest. Thus, the Court held that property interests in animals are on a continuum: wild animals (animals *ferae naturae*) on one end, domes-

ticated animals (such as horses, cattle, and sheep) on the other end, and dogs somewhere in between.³²⁸ To the *Sentell* Court, dogs hold "their lives at the will of the legislature, and properly falling within the police powers of the several states."³²⁹ The Court concluded, "It is purely within the discretion of the legislature to say how far dogs shall be recognized as property, and under what restrictions they shall be permitted to roam the streets."³³⁰

The question of the legal status of dogs and other pets has recently been addressed by courts in the context of family disputes. *Bennett v. Bennett*³³¹ and *Arrington v. Arrington*³³² typify the majority rule with respect to the "custody" of pets upon their owners' divorce. In both cases, divorcing couples sought both custody and visitation of their dogs. In *Bennett* the trial court awarded legal custody of the dog, Roddy, to the husband, with the wife receiving every-other-weekend and holiday visitation rights.³³³ Subsequent squabbling between the parties led the Court to modify its order to have the parties swap custody of the dog every month.³³⁴ The appellate court reversed the trial court's order and affirmed the *Sentell* doctrine: "While a dog may be considered by many to be a member of the family, under Florida law, animals are considered to be personal property."³³⁵ The court found that the trial court lacked authority to order visitation rights in mere property.³³⁶

The court in *Arrington* reached a similar conclusion. *Arrington* involved a custody dispute over Bonnie Lou, "a very fortunate little dog with two humans to shower upon her attentions and genuine love frequently not received by human children from their divorced parents."³³⁷ The trial court had awarded custody of Bonnie Lou to Mrs. Arrington. Mr. Arrington appealed, claiming he should have been appointed "man-

aging conservator” (primary guardian) of Bonnie Lou.³³⁸ The Court held that managing conservatorships were designed for humans, not animals.³³⁹ The Court held, “A dog, for all its admirable and unique qualities, is not a human being and is not treated in the law as such....A dog is personal property, ownership of which is recognized under the law.”³⁴⁰

There is an indication that the legal status of dogs and other pets may be beginning to change. In *Raymond v. Lachmann*, the court had to determine the custody of a cat named Merlin.³⁴¹ The defendant originally owned Merlin, but left him for one and a half years with a former roommate, the plaintiff.³⁴² During that time, the plaintiff renamed him “Lovey” and grew to be quite attached to him.³⁴³ The trial and appellate courts both held that Lovey should remain in the custody of the plaintiff, who had taken care of him for a lengthy period of time. What is remarkable about this case is that the court used a “best interests of the cat” standard to decide the issue. The court discarded strict application of property law and in its place adopted a version of the “best interests of the child” standard from (human) family law. The court held:

Cognizant of the cherished status accorded to pets in our society, the strong emotions engendered by disputes of this nature, and the limited ability of the courts to resolve them satisfactorily, on the record presented, we think it best for all concerned that, given his limited life expectancy, Lovey, who is now almost ten years old, remain where he has lived, prospered, loved, and been loved for the past four years.³⁴⁴

Some courts have also recognized that pets are more than mere property in the context of tort awards. In *Corso v. Crawford Dog & Cat Hospital, Inc.*,³⁴⁵ a New

York City civil court judge awarded \$700 in damages to the owner of a deceased poodle. The dog had been euthanized by the defendant, on instructions from the plaintiff.³⁴⁶ “The plaintiff had arranged for an elaborate funeral...including a headstone, an epitaph, and attendance by plaintiff’s two sisters and a friend.”³⁴⁷ When the plaintiff opened the casket, however, she saw the body of a dead cat.³⁴⁸ She brought suit, alleging that she had suffered emotional distress as a result of the incident.³⁴⁹ The Court held that the plaintiff was entitled to sue not just for the market value of the dog (for conversion of her property) but also for her mental anguish and suffering in seeing the cat instead of her dog. The Court stated:

This court now overrules prior precedent and holds that a pet is not just a thing but occupies a special place somewhere in between a person and a piece of personal property....A pet is not an inanimate thing that just receives affection it also returns it....To say that [the poodle] is a piece of personal property and no more is a repudiation of our humanness. This I cannot accept.³⁵⁰

Dicta in other cases demonstrate that courts are beginning to rethink the concept that pets are mere property. In *Bueckner v. Hamel*,³⁵¹ the Texas Court of Appeals had to decide the amount of damages to be awarded the owner of then-deceased dogs, a dalmatian and an Australian shepherd.³⁵² The defendant shot the dogs while they were chasing a deer.³⁵³ The plaintiffs brought suit to recover damages for the loss of their property, which the trial court found “had special value to the Plaintiffs and were loved as pets by the Plaintiffs.”³⁵⁴ The majority concluded that “Texas law recognizes a dog as personal property”³⁵⁵—a holding consis-

tent with *Sentell*. The majority went on to hold that the plaintiffs could recover only for the loss of value of prospective puppies but only in the context of how much the animal itself would be worth as breeding stock.³⁵⁶

A concurring judge took a broader view of damages in the case. He said the award for damages should be based on “the intrinsic or special value of domestic animals as companions and beloved pets.”³⁵⁷ The market value was inadequate to compensate the plaintiffs for the full extent of their loss.³⁵⁸ “It is common knowledge among pet owners that the death of a beloved dog or cat...can be a great loss.”³⁵⁹ He called for the acknowledgment of pets as a special form of property³⁶⁰ based on the relationship between humans and their pets:

Many people who love and admire dogs as family members do so because of the traits that dogs often embody. These represent some of the best of human traits, including loyalty, trust, courage, playfulness, and love. This cannot be said of inanimate property. At the same time, dogs typically lack the worst human traits, including avarice, apathy, pettiness, and hatred....Losing a beloved pet is not the same as losing an inanimate object, however cherished it may be. Even an heirloom of great sentimental value, if lost, does not constitute a loss comparable to that of a living being. This distinction applies even though the deceased living being is a nonhuman.³⁶¹

Juries have been following this trend. In cases where harm had been done to pets, juries have been awarding damages as high as \$35,000. In contrast, the average award in the early 1990s was only a few hundred dollars.³⁶²

V. Breed Discrimination Should Be Ended Through Legislation or Administrative Regulation

A central principle of insurance law is that insurance companies operate at the pleasure of the states.³⁶³ “Indeed, the organization of an insurance company and the conduct of the business of writing insurance is not a right but a privilege granted by the State subject to the conditions imposed by it to promote the public welfare.”³⁶⁴ The power to regulate insurance is so strong that a state may take over the entire business of insurance if it decides it is in the public interest to do so.³⁶⁵

States have the power to regulate insurers as an exercise of their police power.³⁶⁶ Although insurance law is governed in part by contract law,³⁶⁷ it is also quasi-public in nature.³⁶⁸ States have the power not just to regulate insurance contracts, but also to declare the terms and conditions of those contracts and to impose additional duties and obligations.³⁶⁹ On the other hand, when a state does not regulate a particular practice of the insurance industry, companies are free to contract as they see fit.³⁷⁰

States regulate and legislate insurance on behalf of the public interest. Regulations counterbalance free market forces to protect the public at large.³⁷¹ Some states prohibit unfair and deceptive trade practices.³⁷² Some administratively set rates.³⁷³ In determining whether a rate is reasonable, states will look to see if the rate is based on “legitimate cost factors.”³⁷⁴ Some states require insurers to write policies for particular risks, even though the marketplace may have determined such insureds are

poor risks or that they are simply uninsurable.³⁷⁵

In 1997 D.S. Hellman evaluated the widespread practice of the time of insurers in denying health, life, and disability coverage to victims of domestic abuse.³⁷⁶ She presented a compelling and detailed analysis of the philosophical and legal implications of this practice, ultimately concluding that state legislatures should intervene and prevent underwriting decisions based on a customer’s history of domestic abuse.³⁷⁷

Hellman’s analysis started with the premise that insurers had been able to draw an actuarially justified conclusion that domestic abuse victims were, from a statistical standpoint, more likely than others to be victimized in the future and, thus, to result in claims against their insurers.³⁷⁸ Domestic abuse victims were a higher risk—so high, the insurers concluded, that the insurance pool could not bear to have them as a risk, no matter how high the premium.³⁷⁹ Breed discrimination is an entirely different problem altogether. There is a lack of statistically and scientifically sound data to show that certain breeds are more dangerous than others. Even if such data existed, a plausible case could be made that the breed of a family’s dog should not be used as a factor in underwriting.

Insurers’ Duty

In making underwriting decisions, insurers decide which of many risks to insure in order to protect their fiscal solvency and profitability.³⁸⁰ When an underwriter decides not to insure a particular risk, the would-be insured is left to find insurance elsewhere. If no insurer will underwrite or accept the risk, the result may be a cost-shifting to society³⁸¹ or the loss of an economic opportunity to a consumer.³⁸²

The question then becomes which factors an insurer may consider in making its underwriting decisions. Insurance is a highly regulated industry. It does not operate in a regulatory vacuum, free to let the give-and-take of the marketplace decide who gets insurance, how much coverage they get, and how much it will cost them. There is social utility in making insurance available to the highest number of people possible.³⁸³ Insurance allows people to buy homes, afford health care, and drive automobiles.³⁸⁴ The high stakes and high social utility of insurance have historically justified strict government regulation of the industry.³⁸⁵

All states require underwriting decisions to be based on actuarially sound data.³⁸⁶ In Maryland, for example,

An insurer or insurance producer may not cancel or refuse to underwrite or renew a particular insurance risk or class of risk for a reason based wholly or partly on race, color, creed, sex, or blindness of an applicant or policyholder *or for any arbitrary, capricious, or unfairly discriminatory reason.*³⁸⁷

Maryland law also provides that underwriting must be accomplished “by the application of standards that are reasonably related to the insurer’s economic and business purposes.”³⁸⁸

Actuarially justified underwriting is not only the law, it is good business. By accurately separating out risks into “not insurable” and “insurable” (and, then, in turn, separating out insurable risks into various risk classifications), actuarially justified underwriting promotes efficiency and profit. Consumers are not allowed into the insurance pool when the likelihood of loss is so high that inclusion of their risks threatens the viability of the pool itself.³⁸⁹ For those insureds allowed in the pool, actuarially justified underwriting pro-

motes efficiency by assigning low premiums to low-risk insureds and high premiums to insureds more likely to have a claim.³⁹⁰ This creates a market incentive for low-risk insureds to participate in the pool as opposed to engaging in adverse selection.³⁹¹ Accurate risk classification also maximizes profits for the insurer. By eliminating the highest-risk insureds from the pool, an insurer keeps premiums low for the low-risk insureds who remain. An insurer that does not maintain its “classification edge” faces the potential of having its low-risk insureds leave to join other companies that are able to charge lower premiums due to better risk classification decisions.³⁹² The insurer is stuck with its high-risk insureds as well as the high-risk insureds who migrate over from the insurer’s competition.³⁹³ This means that the insurer is not maximizing its profitability.

How much statistical correlation is required for a rating factor to be “actuarially fair”? How legitimate do “legitimate cost factors” have to be?³⁹⁴ Certainly, perfect 1:1 correlation is not required.³⁹⁵ Thus, I do not suggest that insurers must be able to demonstrate that every Chow Chow will have an unjust bite in its lifetime. Risk classification necessarily will involve some “false positives.”³⁹⁶ Otherwise, insurers would be very limited in the classifications they could use, there would be insufficient stratification of the rate pool, and the dangers of moral hazard³⁹⁷ and adverse selection³⁹⁸ would increase dramatically. On the other end of the spectrum is the insurers’ position, that any correlation is sufficient.³⁹⁹ This is not an economically viable position for an insurer, since low-risk insureds may be incorrectly classified as high-risk customers, and high-risk insureds might be priced out altogether.⁴⁰⁰ For example, my ownership of a rottweiler and a half-Chow put me in an irrationally high-risk classification—so

high that every insurer except the Farm Bureau declined to provide coverage. The dozen or so insurers that I contacted in Lubbock who declined to provide coverage lost out on what would otherwise be a low-risk insured, simply because they adhered to a hypothesis (rottweilers and Chow Chows are more dangerous than other dogs) that has not been scientifically proven. In my case, the insurer who used a more actuarially sound rate classification structure (the Farm Bureau) benefited by offering a low-risk consumer a low-risk premium, thus gaining a market advantage over its competition.⁴⁰¹

I do not believe there exist sufficient data for an insurer to even justify a weak correlation between breed and bite risk. Insurers should work to minimize the risk of false positives so as to “fine tune” their risk classifications to the greatest extent possible.⁴⁰² Risk classifications should be sufficiently refined so as not to be overbroad. Excluding all dogs would clearly be overbroad and would come with high social costs. Excluding some breeds is also unsound, based on my review of the scientific literature.⁴⁰³ What I propose—and what the Task Force on Canine Aggression and Human-Canine Interactions proposed⁴⁰⁴—is the refinement of breed-specific actions by legislatures and insurers to control and regulate “dangerous dogs.” Dangerous dogs are those who have demonstrated (on an individual, dog-by-dog basis) a propensity for violence. This would be actuarially fair because adequate evidence exists that a dog with a history of unjustified bites is likely to be dangerous in the future.

As demonstrated in Part II, there is insufficient evidence to support the insurance industry’s argument that certain breeds bite more often. In other words, the current risk classification (by breed) is too general and is generating too many false positives while at the same time having unnecessary social

costs. A spokesperson for the III recently conceded, “[T]he industry isn’t positioned to determine which dogs should be deemed vicious.... [W]e’re certainly not dog experts or veterinarians.”⁴⁰⁵ Unless and until the industry can demonstrate that different breeds have different relative dangerousness ratios with some degree of accuracy, breed discrimination should be opposed by the general public, insurers themselves, and regulators.

Arguments to Support Regulation in the Public Interest

The law is full of examples where “actuarially fair” factors have nevertheless been prohibited in underwriting because of overriding public interests. Statistical correlation between behavior and risk, therefore, is only the first step in a much bigger, public policy analysis. Drive-through deliveries,⁴⁰⁶ preexisting medical conditions,⁴⁰⁷ civil rights,⁴⁰⁸ and witness intimidation⁴⁰⁹ are all examples of where otherwise actuarially justified practices were prohibited by state legislatures and courts due to overriding interests in equality, health, and fairness.

Part IV demonstrated the importance of dogs and other pets in society. Pets provide physical and emotional benefits to humans and are not mere property. Even if breed discrimination were actuarially justified, I think a plausible argument would exist that the practice should be regulated because of the public interest in protecting animal-human bonds.

There is an additional, and arguably more important, social value that is compromised by breed discrimination: homeownership. Most home buyers require homeowners’ insurance in order to purchase a home. This requirement comes from mortgageors, who

require some protection in the event their security (the home itself) is destroyed, damaged, or otherwise made unavailable for collection.⁴¹⁰ As the Seventh Circuit stated in *NAACP v. American Family Mutual Insurance Co.*,⁴¹¹ “No insurance, no loan; no loan, no house; lack of insurance thus makes housing unavailable.”⁴¹² The issue in *American Family* was a practice known as “red-lining” where homeowners’ insurance companies were charging higher rates, or declining to write insurance altogether, based on geographic location of insureds.⁴¹³ The boundaries (“redlines”) that defined the no-insurance zones frequently fell along racial and socioeconomic lines, and the NAACP brought suit alleging that this practice was discriminatory and illegal. The Seventh Circuit held that red-lining violated the Fair Housing Act, a statute passed by Congress to prohibit discrimination in the housing market.⁴¹⁴

It is quite possible that red-lining was actuarially justified; that is, it may have in fact cost insurance companies more to write policies in certain areas than others. This, however, did not end the inquiry for Congress or the Court of Appeals. The Seventh Circuit held that homeowners’ insurance is a service that has the power to make homeownership available.⁴¹⁵ If a plaintiff can demonstrate that an application for homeowners’ insurance was rejected or unfairly rated on the basis of race or another prohibited factor, the practice constitutes discrimination in housing.⁴¹⁶

Homeownership is a worthwhile public interest. People who own their homes develop roots in a given community. A homeowner is less likely to leave than is someone who is in a year-to-year or month-to-month lease. The homeowner, therefore, has a personal investment in the well-being of the community. Homeownership provides an incentive for civic involvement

and community-wide improvement. For many families, homeownership is the way to accumulate wealth for the future.⁴¹⁷ Home equity can be borrowed against for emergencies, higher education, or retirement.⁴¹⁸ The family home is often the most significant component in an estate after a parent dies.⁴¹⁹

Breed discrimination should, thus, be viewed in a larger social context. There is a high social cost when someone is denied homeowners’ insurance: he is unable to buy a home.⁴²⁰ The social harm in preventing the dream of homeownership must be weighed against the small risk of a dog-bite claim. There are over fifty million dogs in the United States, yet only a few dogs have been responsible for biting people.

This is *not* a simple matter of deciding to throw away the family trampoline or forgo the purchase of an in-ground pool. Pets are not mere property. To make people choose between the family pet and homeownership is unfair, unnecessary, and goes against an important social value: homeownership.

How Else Can Insurers Control Risk?

Let me assume for the moment that insurers could demonstrate with some degree of actuarial confidence that some breeds are more likely to bite than others. Could there be other ways of controlling this risk, short of outright denial of coverage?

Exclusions

When I was shopping for homeowners’ insurance, one of the first questions I asked insurers was whether they would write a policy with an exclusion for dog bites. I did this because I was desperate—I needed insurance and I was willing to assume the risk that my dogs were not dangerous and were

not likely to bite someone. Insurers still turned me away. They refused to write a policy with a dog-bite exclusion in it.

There are several good reasons why exclusions may not be good public policy or wise business sense. Exclusions operate to the detriment of third parties, those would-be plaintiffs who are injured and need compensation for their loss. Exclusions would create pockets of plaintiffs who would, in effect, have no way to satisfy a judgment if they could prove liability. This is not an insignificant public policy, for the same reason that states require certain professionals to have liability insurance⁴²¹ and drivers to carry minimum limits on their automobile policies,⁴²² to provide a source of recovery for third parties in the event of a legitimate claim. If we exclude dog bites or even those dog bites from breeds we can prove are the most dangerous, we would run the risk of creating a special class of plaintiffs who would have no source of recovery. Plaintiffs would have to turn to other sources in order to have their basic medical needs met.⁴²³

Exclusions are also bad for business because they make insurance less attractive to consumers. A person with cancer is a much higher risk than a healthy individual. If a health insurer began excluding coverage for cancer treatment, few employers or individual consumers would purchase that company’s insurance. My decision to try to bargain my way into the insurance risk pool by excluding dog bites from coverage was, in reality, pretty stupid. In the rare event that I was found liable for one of my dogs biting someone, I would be solely responsible for the judgment against me. I would lose whatever equity I had in my house, my car, my savings, and I could have my wages garnished. In retrospect, an exclusion would not have been a good choice for me.

Insure but Reclassify

Another option would be for insurers to write policies for families with “dangerous” breeds but charge them higher premiums. Risk classification is an accepted practice in the insurance industry.⁴²⁴ By separating and grouping people of similar risks, insurers keep rates low for the desirable, low-risk insureds, and insure adequate resources in the event that high-risk insureds cause a claim.⁴²⁵ I would have the same objection to high-risk classification for owners of certain breeds as I would for outright refusals to insure, that is, the lack of actuarial justification for the practice of breed discrimination. Classifying certain dog owners in a higher category is unfair because it places those insureds in an artificially higher rate bracket. This is economically inefficient, although perhaps more profitable for the insurer.

Where I think risk classification could work is if insurers could demonstrate—to the veterinary and CDC communities with a sufficient degree of scientific certainty—that certain breeds, when they do bite, cause more damage. It is hypothesized, for example, that the jaw structure of pit bulls causes them to inflict more injury than other breeds.⁴²⁶ This would still be breed discrimination⁴²⁷ but, in my view, an acceptable form of risk classification...*provided there is a scientific/veterinary basis for the conclusion.* To date, the studies in this area have focused on determining the number of bites per breed, not the amount of *damage per bite*.

I believe insurers would also be actuarially justified in classifying homeowners based on whether or not they own a dog, period. One does not need to be an actuary to state that a dog owner is more likely than a non-owner to have a bite claim against him. Insurers could simply classify all dog owners at a higher rate level because they

are more likely to have claims against them. Let’s be clear: this is not what is going on right now. The current practice of breed discrimination is to differentiate among breeds, even though there is no statistical evidence to prove that certain breeds are more dangerous than others. This creates an artificial risk classification that charges owners of certain breeds more than others.

If all dog owners were classified at a higher rate than non-dog owners, I think there would be a great public outcry. Then the social value of dogs as pets—and as security alarms on four paws—would come to the forefront of the debate.

Allow the Marketplace to Correct Itself

If, as I conclude, there are no reliable data to support breed discrimination, then there is a market of consumers (owners of rottweilers, pit bulls, etc.) being overcharged or not served altogether. This creates an economic inefficiency. An insurer with good business judgment would seek to corner this underserved market by writing policies with low-risk premiums.

There are a number of reasons why the market is not correcting itself. The number and identity of people being affected by breed discrimination is unknown. Without these data it would be difficult for an insurer to market itself to those consumers. Also at work is the fact that insurers try to market themselves to the lowest-risk consumers. Although these consumers pay lower premiums, they are responsible for fewer claims. Every insurer tries to maximize its number of low-risk insureds while maximizing the number of high-risk insureds who are serviced by its competitors.⁴²⁸ The insurance industry as a whole appears to be caught up in this breed discrimination hysteria. Individual companies may fear that the assumptions behind breed discrimination are in

fact true and therefore see little incentive to market themselves to people they view as high-risk. For these reasons, it is unlikely that the marketplace will correct itself to end breed discrimination.

Other Solutions

Preventing law-abiding homeowners from obtaining insurance is not the answer to the problem of dog bites. Better and more effective alternatives exist.⁴²⁹

Collect Better Data

An initial first step would be to improve surveillance and reporting of dog bites. Until accurate numbers for the numerator and denominator in the relative dangerousness ratio can be ascertained, insurers and governments will be without realistic data on which to base meaningful decisions. The need for more accurate data collection has been championed by the very scientists who have tried to calculate the scope of the dog-biting problem.⁴³⁰ In addition, studies should be commissioned to determine if certain breeds, when they do bite, cause more physical injury or damage.⁴³¹

Enforce Existing Laws Against Dogfighting and Dogs at Large

There are existing laws that, if enforced more vigorously, could reduce the number of dog bites. Dogfighting explains why some dogs are vicious. This underground industry brings some dogs “to the verge of bloodlust.”⁴³² By shutting down criminal organizations of illegitimate breeders, promoters, and owners, local governments could take a first step toward reducing bites by dogs that have been purposely bred to be dangerous.⁴³³ The AKC and other groups support the use of existing laws to break up dogfighting rings.⁴³⁴

Many attacks appear to be caused by strays or dogs who have been per-

mitted to run off-leash.⁴³⁵ The enforcement of existing laws against “dogs at-large” could reduce the number of bites.⁴³⁶ While these laws exist in many places, they are not adequately enforced.

Owners are sometimes to blame for socializing a dog to be dangerous or for permitting it to get into situations where it can cause injury. Dogfighting, leash, and at-large laws address the root of the problem, which is irresponsible dog ownership. A dog is just as good as his owner trains him to be. One problem dog can be seized and destroyed. One problem owner, however, can continually breed, adopt, or purchase dog after dog. Replacing one dog with another, or one breed with another, will not help to reduce the overall problem of owner irresponsibility.⁴³⁷ Existing laws can and should be used to address the behavior.

Regulate Problem Dogs with Existing “Dangerous Dog” Laws

Some dogs, as a result of socialization (or lack thereof), bad temperament, or genetics, demonstrate that they are dangerous. They have a history of bites or attacks against people or other animals.⁴³⁸ By regulating these individual dogs, municipalities can focus their efforts on the specific dogs likely to cause injuries in the future.⁴³⁹ Instead of targeting an entire breed, governments can address the handful of dogs who are really the problem.

There are existing laws that permit local governments to regulate, or in some cases seize and destroy, dogs who have demonstrated a propensity to bite without just cause. Michigan enacted a statute to permit local governments to seize “dangerous animals” and have them tattooed, insured, fenced, sterilized, destroyed, “or any other action appropriate to protect the public.”⁴⁴⁰ The statute

provides due process protections to the owner—requiring a hearing by a judge and a finding of dangerousness before a disposition is ordered.⁴⁴¹ A dangerous animal is one who, without just cause,⁴⁴² bites or attacks a person, or a dog who bites or attacks and causes serious injury or death to another dog while the other dog is on the property or under the control of its owner.⁴⁴³ Oklahoma has a similar statute that allows for heightened regulation of animals declared dangerous by their conduct,⁴⁴⁴ but prohibits local governments from enacting breed-specific legislation.⁴⁴⁵

“Most of the approximately 55 million dogs in the United States never bite or kill humans.”⁴⁴⁶ Dangerous-dog laws are narrowly tailored to address the real problem, which is the small percentage of the overall dog population that is responsible for bites, injuries, and deaths.⁴⁴⁷ Dangerous-dog laws exist in many states. Insurers could work with local governments to fund additional animal-control officers or work with owners of dangerous dogs to help take steps to prevent future dangerous acts.⁴⁴⁸

Educate the Public, Particularly Children, about Animal Behavior

Insurers and local governments could partner together to educate the public about proper ways of socializing and approaching dogs. Proper training is essential for a family with a new dog.⁴⁴⁹ Public education about the importance of neutering can reduce the incidence of dog bites⁴⁵⁰ because a disproportionate number of bites are caused by intact dogs.⁴⁵¹ New owners should also be educated about the steps in picking the right dog for a household.⁴⁵² “[T]here is no all-around best breed.”⁴⁵³ Certain breeds will be more compatible with certain types of families.⁴⁵⁴

Children must also be educated about dealing with dogs safely.⁴⁵⁵ At least one study has demonstrated the effectiveness of public education as a way to improve children’s behavior around and toward dogs.⁴⁵⁶ The study, conducted in Australia, examined the reactions of children, ages seven to eight, to a dog that was tied up in their playground.⁴⁵⁷ Half of the study group received a thirty-minute classroom lesson seven to ten days before on how to safely approach and treat dogs.⁴⁵⁸ Researchers observed the reactions of the children to the dog.⁴⁵⁹ The group that received the classroom instruction displayed greater precautionary behavior than did the control group. While 79 percent of the control group hastily patted the dog and tried to excite it, only 9 percent of the group that received instruction did so.⁴⁶⁰

Conclusion

While dog bites are serious events for those who are bitten, the dog-bite problem is not the public health crisis that the insurance industry has made it out to be. Some perspective is in order. The number of fatalities due to dog bites is very low when compared to the number of people who die from heart disease, cancer, accidents, suicide, and diabetes. Likewise, nonfatal bites are responsible for a small number of injuries when compared to other accidental, unintentional injuries. Falls (11.5 million), motor vehicle accidents (4.3 million), drugs (3.3 million), sports (2.0 million), insect bites (1.7 million), bicycle accidents (1.4 million), poisoning (.7 million), and knives (.6 million) all individually outrank dog bites (.5 million) as public health problems.⁴⁶¹ Similarly, claims paid out by homeowners’ insurance companies for dog bites are miniscule when compared to payouts for property damage. Damage due to fire, water, wind, and theft represents much larger

problems for homeowners' insurance companies.

One way to eliminate the entire problem of dog bites would be to outlaw all dogs.⁴⁶² Without dogs, there would be no dog bites and no dog-bite-related insurance claims.⁴⁶³ While this would result in an elimination of the perceived financial burden to insurers, it would not be "practical, realistic, or desirable" to the average layman, scientist, or dog owner.⁴⁶⁴ Unless we as a society are willing to disregard the social and health benefits of dogs as pets, then we must be willing to accept a certain number of bites. While "[t]he dog bite problem as a whole is not preventable, it is controllable."⁴⁶⁵ Better alternatives to breed discrimination exist, such as education and enforcement of existing dangerous dog laws.

With over 34 percent of households owning at least one dog as a pet, dogs have become valued four-legged members of our society. To the families that love them, pets are not mere chattel. Refusing to write homeowners' insurance policies, therefore, should be a narrowly curtailed remedy, limited to those families that own dogs who have proven to be dangerous to life or property. The insurance industry has chosen to paint with a very broad brush. Breed discrimination is an overreaction, an attempt to solve a small problem by prejudging all dogs of certain breeds as likely to be dangerous in the future.

When insurers develop underwriting standards and decide which risks to insure, they have a responsibility to the public interest. Insurers do not contract with consumers in a vacuum. A long history of state regulation of the industry serves as a backdrop for this issue. Underwriting decisions should be the product of reason, not speculation. In other words, if insurers are going to engage in breed discrimination, they better have hard science to back up their practice.

The science behind dog bites is inconclusive at best. Most of the scientists authoring studies on dog bites have acknowledged that their data are incomplete and should not be used to enact breed-specific legislation or to deny insurance to families with certain dogs. No study has accurately or completely determined the number of bites per breed, or the number of dogs per breed. Without these numbers, it is impossible to compare breeds on the basis of dangerousness. Insurers who are making judgments about certain breeds are doing so without adequate scientific evidence. This is the Achilles' heel of breed discrimination; by acting without adequate evidence, the insurance industry has left itself open to regulation by the states.

State regulation is necessary to correct this injustice in the marketplace. Insureds are being shut out of entire markets because of the near-hysteria that has gripped the insurance industry. This is not a new phenomenon for the industry. In the past insurers have cut benefits and denied applications for insurance based on fiscal cost-benefit analyses that have had collateral social and health consequences. It was more costly to keep new mothers in the hospital for forty-eight hours. Our society came to the recognition, however, that discharging new mothers and their newborns within six hours of delivery was against public policy. Legislatures stepped in to correct the injustice in the marketplace, knowing full well that it would cost the industry more money. The same should be done here.

To the insurance industry, breed discrimination reflects a belief that denying coverage to families with certain breeds of dogs will save them money. Insurers have not produced scientific proof that dogs of certain breeds bite more often or cause more damage. The evidence simply does not exist because of the problems of data col-

lection that I have highlighted here. The irony is that insurers who are practicing breed discrimination are turning away good customers who pay premiums. Legislative action to correct this practice will benefit both families with dogs and the shareholders of insurance companies.

Legislative action in this area is both appropriate and necessary. What happened to me is happening across the country to thousands of other families. To some insurers, dogs are mere property—like an old can of paint that can be left behind when a family moves. The truth is that dogs are members of the American family and deserve to be treated as such. When families are forced to make the choice between owning a home and having a dog, some have no choice at all; they must give up their beloved pet to an animal shelter. There are documented increases in "shelter drop-offs" due to breed discrimination. These animals cannot be housed indefinitely, so many have to be euthanized.

The social cost to families is too much to ride on incomplete statistics and hunches by insurance executives. Legislative action is necessary. Luckily, many state legislators have become aware of this problem and have taken steps to end breed discrimination. Pennsylvania enacted a statute prohibiting breed discrimination, which states the following:

No liability policy or surety bond issued pursuant to this act or any other act may prohibit coverage from any specific breed of dog.⁴⁶⁶

New York is considering legislation that would outlaw breed discrimination as well. Bill 6761 would prohibit insurers from refusing to issue or renew, canceling, or charging or imposing an increased premium or rate for owning a dog of a specific breed.⁴⁶⁷ A New Hampshire bill would prohibit nonrenewal or cancellation of a policy

“based solely on the insured owning a certain breed of dog.”⁴⁶⁸ Other states should follow suit and enact legislation or administrative regulations to prohibit the practice of breed discrimination.

Notes

¹The Farm Bureau provides a number of services to its members, including insurance and banking. See Texas Farm Bureau, <http://www.txfb.org> (accessed July 7, 2004).

²On the other hand, renting would not necessarily have been an easy task either. Many landlords prohibit certain breeds from living on their property or forbid dogs altogether. Obtaining renters’ insurance would also have been difficult because of breed discrimination by insurance companies.

³See *infra* Part IV, for a discussion of the effects of breed discrimination.

⁴See 42 U.S.C. §§ 3601-31 (2003); Mich. Comp. Laws § 37.2302 (2001); N.J. Stat. Ann. §§ 10:5-4, 10:5-9.1 (2002); see also *NAACP v. American Family Mutual Insurance Company*, 978 F.2d 287, 297-98 (7th Cir. 1992) (Fair Housing Act is applicable to allegations of racially discriminatory red-lining).

⁵American Veterinary Medical Association, Task Force on Canine Aggression and Human-Canine Interactions, “A Community Approach to Dog Bite Prevention,” *Journal of the American Veterinary Medicine Association* 218 (2001), 1732, 1733 (hereinafter Task Force).

⁶See Richard Willing, (2000). “Under Law, Pets Are Becoming Almost Human,” *USA Today* (Sept. 13, 2000), 1A.

⁷Fred Bayles, “Pit Bullterriers: Too Fierce to Live? Call for Ban Follow Maimings, Death,” *The Record* (Dec. 30, 1985), B16.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Garcia v. Vill. of Tijeras*, 767 P.2d 355, 362 (N.M. Ct. App. 1988).

¹³Bayles, *supra* note 7, B16.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Bob Egelko, “Appeal for Murder Rap in Dog-Maul Case/Attorney General Says Judge Had No Right to Let Knoller Off So Easy,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (April 12, 2003), A15.

¹⁶Kenneth Phillips, “Diane Whipple Case,” <http://www.dogbitelaw.com/PAGES/Whipple.html> (accessed Jan. 8, 2004).

¹⁷Karyn Grey, Note, “Breed-Specific Legislation Revisited: Canine Racism or the Answer to Florida’s Dog Control Problems?,” *Nova Law Review* 27 (2003), 415, 417 (describing a series of dog attacks in Florida); see Julie A. Thorne, Note, “If Spot Bites the Neighbor, Should Dick and Jane Go to Jail?” *Syracuse Law Review* 39 (1988), 1445, 1445 (asserting that media attention fueled public outrage against pit bulls); see generally Jeffrey J. Sacks et al., “Fatal Dog Attacks, 1989–1994,” *Pediatrics* 97 (June 1996), 891 (hereinafter CDC 1989–1994).

¹⁸For a list of communities that have adopted or are considering BSL, see Jan Cooper, “Breed Specific Legislation,” <http://www.rot-n-chatter.com/rotweilers/laws/>

[breedspecific.html](#) (accessed June, 2004).

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Ohio Rev. Code Ann. § 955.11(a)(1)(B) (4)(a)(iii) (West 2004).

²¹*Ibid.* § 955.11. For a general discussion of Ohio’s regulation of pit bulls, see Paula Lynn Wilson, Note, “A.M. Sub. H.B. 352: An Overview—Dogs Under Control,” *University of Dayton Law Review* 13 (1988), 297.

²²Ohio Revised Code Annotated § 955.22(C) (West 2004).

²³*Ibid.* § 955.22(D)(2).

²⁴*Ibid.* § 955.22(E).

²⁵Denver, Colorado, Revised Municipal Code § 8-55(a) (2003). The ordinance provides several exceptions, including a grandfather clause, possession by animal shelters or humane societies, public exhibition, or transportation through the city. *Ibid.* § 8-55(c).

²⁶*Ibid.* § 8-55(b)(2). For an analysis of the problem of defining “pit bull,” see *infra* notes 240–241 and accompanying text.

²⁷*Ibid.* § 8-52(a)(1).

²⁸*Ibid.* § 8-52(c)-(d).

²⁹Fla. Stat. Ann. § 767.14 (West 2003).

³⁰See Grey, *supra* note 17, 418.

³¹Minn. Stat. Ann. § 347.51(8) (West 2004).

³²See generally Russell G. Donaldson, Annotation, “Validity and Construction of Statute, Ordinance or Regulation Applying to Specific Dog Breeds, Such as ‘pit bulls’ or ‘Bull Terriers,’” 80 *American Law Reports* 4th 70 (2004). For discussion and background on challenges to BSL, see Thorne, *supra* note 17; Lynn Marmer, Comment, “The New Breed of Municipal Dog Control Laws: Are They Constitutional?” *University of Cincinnati Law Review* 53 (1984), 1067; Heather K. Pratt, Comment, “Canine Profiling: Does Breed-Specific Legislation Take a Bite Out of Canine Crime?” *Pennsylvania State Law Review* 108 (2004), 855.

Cases in which courts have upheld the constitutionality of BSL include: *Vanater v. Village of South Point*, 717 F. Supp. 1236 (S.D. Ohio 1989); *Colorado Dog Fanciers, Inc. v. City and County of Denver*, 820 P.2d 644 (Colo. 1991) (en banc); *State v. Peters*, 534 So. 2d 760 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1988); *Hearn v. City of Overland Park*, 772 P.2d 758, 766 (Kan. 1989); *Garcia v. Village of Tijeras*, 767 P.2d 355 (N.M. Ct. App. 1988); *State v. Anderson*, 566 N.E.2d 1224 (Ohio 1991); *State v. Robinson*, 541 N.E.2d 1092 (Ohio Ct. App. 1989); *American Dog Owners Association v. City of Yakima*, 777 P.2d 1046 (Wash. 1989) (en banc).

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, however, found a pit bull ban in Lynn, Massachusetts, to be unconstitutional. *American Dog Owners Association, Inc. v. City of Lynn*, 533 N.E.2d 642, 646 (Mass. 1989).

³³U.S. Constitution, amendment V.

³⁴Sallyanne K. Sullivan, “Banning the Pit Bull: Why Breed-Specific Legislation Is Constitutional,” *University of Dayton Law Review* 13 (1988), 279, 280–93.

³⁵See, for example, *Garcia*, 767 P.2d at 358. Since dog ownership is not a “fundamental right,” BSL need only meet the “rational relationship” test to be constitutional. Sullivan, *supra* note 34, 281.

³⁶See, for example, *Garcia*, 767 P.2d at 358–62.

³⁷See, for example, *ibid.*, 361.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹See, for example, *ibid.*, 361–63.

⁴⁰See, for example, *Hearn v. City of Overland Park*, 772 P.2d 758, 762–65 (Kan. 1989).

⁴¹See, for example, *ibid.*

⁴²See, for example, *ibid.*, 766.

⁴³See, for example, *ibid.*

⁴⁴533 N.E.2d 642 (Mass. 1989).

⁴⁵The ordinance prohibited the sale of pit bulls and required the registration of any pit bulls within city limits. *Ibid.*, 644. Transportation of pit bulls was permitted only if they were muzzled and leashed. Even then, they could only be transported to a veterinarian. *Ibid.*

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 644. For further discussion of the problem of identifying dogs by breed, see *infra* Part II.

⁴⁷*American Dog Owners Association, Inc.*, 533 N.E.2d, 644.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 646.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹*Ibid.* The purpose of this article is not to address the constitutionality of BSL, but rather to focus on the insurance aspect of breed discrimination. For further discussion of BSL, see Linda S. Weiss, “Breed-Specific Legislation in the United States,” Animal Legal and Historical Web Center (2001), <http://www.animallaw.info/articles/aruskweiss2001.htm> (accessed June 8, 2004); Randall Lockwood, “Humane Concerns About Dangerous Dog Laws,” *University of Dayton Law Review* 13 (1988), 267; Grey, *supra* note 17; Ohio Valley Dog Owners, Inc., “OVDO Is Opposed to Breed-Specific Bans” (2003), <http://www.canismajor.com/orgs/ovdo/bslho.html> (hereinafter OVDO); Cindy Andrist, Note, “Is There (and Should There Be) Any ‘Bite’ Left in Georgia’s ‘First Bite’ Rule?” *Georgia Law Review* 34 (2000), 1343; Marmer, *supra* note 32, at 1067; Pratt, *supra* note 32, at 855; Sullivan, *supra* note 34, 279; Diane Blackman, “Practicality of Breed Specific Legislation in Reducing or Eliminating Dog Attacks on Humans and Dogs,” <http://www.dog-play.com/pitbull.html> (accessed July 14, 2003).

⁵²“Insurance Industry Discriminates Against Dogs,” *CBS News: Evening News with Dan Rather* (CBS television broadcast, June 3, 2003), available at 2003 WL 5212276.

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴See, for example, Jeff Bertolucci, “Man’s Best Friend but Insurers’ Foe: Their Assembly Bill Has Failed, But Dog Lovers Continue to Rail Against Breed Discrimination,” *Los Angeles Times* (June 6, 2004), K1 (discussing failure of Bill AB 2399, prohibiting breed discrimination but allowing a higher premium and requiring a discount for canines that pass an obedience test); Vincent J. Schodolski, “Bad’ Dogs Put Costly Bite on Insurers, Homeowners,” *Chicago Tribune* (May 17, 2004), 1; Jeff Bertolucci, “Is Nothing Private? Home Insurers Ask About Everything from Rover to Rolex. And the Answers Matter,” *Los Angeles Times* (May 9, 2004), K1; Allan Woods, “Rotweilers, Pit Bulls New Insurance Liability,” *National Post* (March 26, 2004), A3; Michele Derus, “Dog Bites Giving Insurers Pause,” *Milwaukee Journal and Sentinel* (Feb. 29, 2004), 1F; Gloria Campisi, “Beware of Dog When Seeking Insurance; Some Firms Have ‘Bad Breed’ Lists,” *Philadelphia Daily News* (Oct. 7, 2003), 14; Ryan Slight, “Liability Factor Can

Hurt Homeowners,” *Springfield News-Leader* (Sept. 28, 2003), 6A; William Sweet, “Insurers in Doghouse with Some Pet Owners,” *Springfield Union-News* (Aug. 19, 2003), A01; Purva Patel, “A Bite to the Pocket, Home Insurers Often Charge Higher Premiums Because of Dogs,” *Sun-Sentinel* (Ft. Lauderdale, Florida) (Aug. 12, 2003), 1D; Charles Toutant, “Insurers Attempt to Leash Dog-Bite Claims: Small-Scale Nuisance Litigation Turning Into Big Business,” *Connecticut Law Tribune* 29 (Aug. 11, 2003), 8; Jim Spencer, “Homeowners Insurance Rules Not for the Dogs,” *Daily Press* (Virginia) (Jan. 10, 2003), C1.

Breed discrimination is not confined to American insurers, either. Reports have also come from Canada describing the practice there by Canadian insurance companies. “Calgary Man Denied Home Insurance Renewal Due to the Type of Dogs He Has,” *Canadian Press* (March 25, 2004), available at 2004 WL 74118306; “Some Insurance Companies Won’t Cover You if You Own Certain Dogs,” *CTV News-PM* (CTV television broadcast, March 24, 2004), available at 2004 WL 60848476.

⁵⁵See Patrick McMahon, “Dog Owners’ New Policy: Bite Back,” *USA Today* (May 20, 2003), 03a.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷*Ibid.* I wonder if breed discrimination is encouraging homeowners, who are in a situation like mine or the Craanens’, to engage in policy fraud by lying about their pet’s breed or by hiding the dog altogether. In *Mutual Benefit Insurance Co. v. Lorence*, No. 02-1734, 2003 WL 1354845 (4th Cir. Mar. 20, 2003), homeowners lied on their insurance application about owning dogs. One of their dogs (a pit bull) subsequently attacked a mother and her son, resulting in a claim against the homeowners’ insurance. The insurer brought suit against the owners, seeking a declaratory judgment that it was not required to defend the claim because of the misrepresentation. *Ibid.*, *596. The courts, however, declined to exercise jurisdiction and instead deferred to ongoing proceedings before the Maryland Insurance Administration. *Ibid.*, 597. The owners had filed a complaint with the MIA alleging that the insurance company’s practice of breed discrimination is against Maryland law. *Ibid.*, 596–597.

⁵⁸Stephanie Davis, “ASPCA/HSUS Campaign Tackles Insurance Industry,” *DVM: The Newspaper Magazine of Veterinarian Medicine* 34 (November 2003), 1. (“Some household name insurance companies either have canceled or refused to write homeowners’ policies for individuals with certain dog breeds.”)

⁵⁹See Brian Sodergren, “Insurance Companies Unfairly Target Specific Dog Breeds,” <http://www.hsus.org/ace/18624> (accessed June 11, 2004) (perceived increase in the number of claims, or risk, exists for people who own certain breeds of dogs).

⁶⁰See *infra* Part I. for the insurance industry’s arguments in favor of breed discrimination.

⁶¹Davis, *supra* note 58.

⁶²Sodergren, *supra* note 59.

⁶³Dog owners wishing to report incidents of breed discrimination to The HSUS can do so at the following website: http://files.hsus.org/web-files/PDF/insurance_incident_form.pdf

(accessed July 5, 2004). See Sodergren, *supra* note 59.

⁶⁴Davis, *supra* note 58.

⁶⁵Insurance Information Institute, “Homeowners Insurance,” <http://www.iii.org/media/facts/statsbyissue/homeowners/> (accessed June 11, 2004) (hereinafter III, Homeowners Insurance).

⁶⁶Insurance Information Institute, “Dog Bite Liability,” <http://www.iii.org/media/hottopics/insurance/dogbite/> (accessed June 11, 2004) (hereinafter III, Dog Bite Liability).

⁶⁷III, Homeowners Insurance, *supra* note 65.

⁶⁸III, Dog Bite Liability, *supra* note 66. The insurance industry points to rising construction costs and natural disasters, such as wind and hail, as principal causes for the rise in premiums. *Ibid.*

⁶⁹Davis, *supra* note 58, 36 (quoting Alejandra Soto, spokesperson for the Insurance Information Institute, a trade group of the insurance industry).

⁷⁰Dan Hattaway, “Dogs and Insurance,” *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 210 (April 15, 1997), 1143.

⁷¹Sodergren, *supra* note 59.

⁷²III, Dog Bite Liability, *supra* note 66.

⁷³Nationwide Insurance stated to *USA Today* that it relies on CDC data to support its breed-specific policies. McMahon, *supra* note 55, 03a.

⁷⁴*Infra* Part II.

⁷⁵III, Dog Bite Liability, *supra* note 66.

⁷⁶*Ibid.* One insurance company, State Farm Fire and Casualty Co., reported that in 1995 it paid out \$70 million on eleven thousand claims. That year, it insured a total of five million dog-owning homes. See Hattaway, *supra* note 70, 1144.

⁷⁷III, Dog Bite Liability, *supra* note 66.

⁷⁸*Ibid.* (emphasis added).

⁷⁹III, Homeowners Insurance, *supra* note 65.

⁸⁰*Ibid.* A plausible argument could be made that dog bites are a preventable risk, in a way that damage due to fire, mold, and theft are not. Property damage claims are the result of true accidents—unforeseeable acts for which insurers have little to no control over. Dog bites are one small way in which insurers can try to minimize risk.

In reality, big-ticket risks can be controlled. Insurers could decide, for example, not to insure a home unless it has smoke detectors. This would provide an incentive for people to install smoke detectors, which would, in turn, reduce the number of fire-related claims. Insurers could also justify refusing to write policies for homes where there is a high risk of wind or hail damage. Any risk is controllable, but only to the extent that the insurance market can bear the loss of this business.

⁸¹As shown, *supra*, while the industry’s aggregate figures may sound “scary,” they misstate the scope of the dog-bite problem in the larger context of total claims paid.

⁸²III, Dog Bite Liability, *supra* note 66.

⁸³Davis, *supra* note 58, 36 (“We just know that certain breeds, when they do attack, tend to cause a lot more damage when they do bite, not because they bite most often.”); Randall Lockwood and Kate Rindy, “Are ‘Pit Bulls’ Different? An Analysis of the Pit Bull Terrier Con-

troversy,” *Anthrozoös* 1 (1987), 2, 4 (damage caused by pit bulls is generally more severe due to the attack behavior of the breed).

⁸⁴Davis, *supra* note 58, 36 (quoting Alejandra Soto, spokesperson for the III).

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 38. This policy of exclusion is not without problems, as it leaves plaintiffs without a remedy if a dog bite does occur and subjects a homeowner to loss of the home and bankruptcy. Kenneth Phillips, “Breed Specific Laws, Regulations and Bans,” available at <http://www.dogbitelaw.com/PAGES/breedlaws.html> (accessed July 21, 2003) (Phillips is a lawyer and expert on dog-bite law). Litigation over exclusions can be costly and lengthy and can lead to uncertainty in the marketplace.

⁸⁶See Davis, *supra* note 58, 36 (“We don’t discriminate or deny coverage based on breed of dog.”); McMahon, *supra* note 55; Hattaway, *supra* note 70 (author works for State Farm).

⁸⁷Franco Ordonez, “Pet Peeve: A New State Regulation Prohibiting Owners of Some Dog Breeds From Adopting Draws Fire,” *Boston Globe* (Jan. 15, 2003), B1.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

⁸⁹Phillips, *supra* note 85.

⁹⁰*Infra* Part III.

⁹¹Jeffrey J. Sacks et al., “Dog Bite-Related Fatalities From 1979 Through 1988,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 262 (1989), 1489 (hereinafter CDC 1979–1988).

⁹²CDC 1989–1994, *supra* note 17.

⁹³Centers for Disease Control, “Dog Bite Related Fatalities—United States, 1995–1996,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 46 (1997), 463 (1997) (hereinafter CDC 1995–1996).

⁹⁴Jeffrey J. Sacks et al., “Breeds of Dogs Involved in Fatal Human Attacks in the United States Between 1979 and 1998,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 217 (2000), 836 (hereinafter CDC 1979–1998).

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 838.

⁹⁶See *infra* Part II.

⁹⁷CDC 1979–1988, *supra* note 91, 1489.

⁹⁸*Ibid.* The NCHS uses reports from hospitals and other sources to classify deaths. There is a category of deaths just for dog bites: “E906.0.” National Center for Health Statistics et al., *International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision, Clinical Modification* (2003), <http://www.icd.com>.

⁹⁹CDC 1979–1988, *supra* note 91, 1489.

The HSUS reports are particularly detailed and are believed to be the most accurate in determining the true breed of a biting dog. CDC 1989–1994, *supra* note 17, 891. HSUS staff reviewed police reports, animal control reports, statements by dog owners and victims, and photographs. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰CDC 1979–1988, *supra* note 91, 1490; CDC 1989–1994, *supra* note 17, 892.

¹⁰¹CDC 1979–1988, *supra* note 91, 1490.

¹⁰²*Ibid.* Between 1989 and 1994, that figure had dropped to 56.9 percent. CDC 1989–1994, *supra* note 17, 892. From 1995 through 1996, that number climbed to 80 percent. CDC 1995–1996, *supra* note 93, 463. From 1997 through 1998, the number settled at 70 percent. CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 837.

Victims were often elderly, suggesting that, “The main victims of fatal dog bites were the very young and very old, those least able to

protect themselves.” CDC 1979–1988, *supra* note 91, 1492.

¹⁰³CDC 1979–1988, *supra* note 91, 1490.

¹⁰⁴CDC 1995–1996, *supra* note 93, 463.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 839.

The Sacks/Sinclair study attempted to piece together the data on attacks by breed from the previous three studies as well as new data from 1997 and 1998. *Ibid.*, 837.

¹⁰⁸CDC 1979–1988, *supra* note 91.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*

¹¹⁰CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 837.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*

¹¹²*Ibid.* This accounted for approximately 28 percent of the deaths during the study period.

¹¹³CDC 1979–1988, *supra* note 91, 1492.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 1489. For further discussion of the problem of breed misidentification, see *infra* Part II.

¹¹⁵CDC 1979–1988, *supra* note 91, 1492.

¹¹⁶CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 838.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.* (Fatal attacks are easier to track than nonfatal bites because fatal attacks result in SCMT coding and are more likely to be reported by the news media).

¹¹⁸CDC 1979–1988, *supra* note 91, 1492.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 1491.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*

¹²¹See *supra* note 101 and accompanying text.

¹²²CDC 1989–1994, *supra* note 17, 894. They estimated that, in 1994, 1.8 percent of the population was bitten by a dog and 0.3 percent of the U.S. population sought some medical care for a dog bite.

¹²³Centers for Disease Control, “Nonfatal Dog Bites-Related Injuries Treated in Hospital Emergency Departments—United States, 2001,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 52 (July 4, 2003) 605 (hereinafter CDC Nonfatal).

¹²⁴*Ibid.* The NEISS-AIP is operated by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*

¹²⁶*Ibid.* Deaths were excluded from the study.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*

¹²⁸*Ibid.*

¹²⁹*Ibid.*

¹³⁰*Ibid.*

¹³¹*Ibid.*

¹³²*Ibid.*, 607.

¹³³*Ibid.*

¹³⁴*Ibid.*

¹³⁵*Ibid.*

¹³⁶See *infra* Part II.

¹³⁷CDC Nonfatal, *supra* note 123.

¹³⁸See *infra* Part II. for a discussion of what I call “just cause” bites.

¹³⁹Kenneth A. Gershman, Jeffrey J. Sacks, and John C. Wright, “Which Dogs Bite? A Case-Control Study of Risk Factors,” *Pediatrics* 93 (1994), 913. Two of the three authors, Gershman and Sacks, were with the CDC at the time.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 913.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, 914.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, 913.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.* To create a control group, the authors used the first five digits of a biting-dog owner’s phone number and randomized

the last two digits. They called numbers until an eligible control dog was found.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 915.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 914; see also *supra* notes 25–28 and accompanying text.

¹⁴⁷Gershman, *supra* note 139, 916.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 914.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 916.

¹⁵⁰Jeffrey J. Sacks, Marcie-jo Kresnow, and Barbara Houston, “Dog Bites: How Big a Problem?” *Injury Prevention* 2 (1996), 52 (two of the three scientists who conducted the survey were with the CDC at the time).

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*

¹⁵³*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹Harold B. Weiss, Deborah L. Friedman, and Jeffrey H. Coben, “Incidence of Dog Bite Injuries Treated in Emergency Departments,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 279 (1998), 51.

¹⁶⁰CDC Nonfatal, *supra* note 123.

¹⁶¹Weiss, *supra* note 159, 51.

¹⁶²*Ibid.*

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 53. The conclusions about the monetary impact of dog bites were confirmed by a CDC study in 1999. See Kyran P. Quinlan and Jeffrey J. Sacks, “Hospitalization for Dog Bite Injuries,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 281 (1999), 232. A sample of 904 hospitals in seventeen states found that 5,991 hospital discharges in 1994 were the result of dog bite injuries. The average length of stay was 3.6 days, costing a total of \$164.9 million in direct care per year.

¹⁶⁷In this respect, it suffers from many of the same flaws as the CDC nonfatal bite study discussed *supra* in Part I.A.2.

¹⁶⁸Jeffrey R. Avner and M. Douglas Baker, “Dog Bites in Urban Children,” *Pediatrics* 88 (1991), 55.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.* Consequently, the authors concluded that in such cases the patient’s accuracy of breed identification should be high. *Ibid.*, 57. I disagree with this conclusion. Just because Little Johnnie knows Spot from the neighborhood does not necessarily mean that Johnnie knows with any certainty what breed Spot is.

¹⁷¹*Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁷²*Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁷³Yue-Fang Chang et al., “Dog Bite Incidence in the City of Pittsburgh: A Capture-Recapture Approach,” *American Journal of Public Health* 87 (1997), 1703.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 1703.

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 1703–1704.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 1704.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸Alan M. Beck and Barbara A. Jones, “Unreported Dog Bites in Children,” *Public Health Report* 100 (1985), 315.

¹⁷⁹The authors described previous studies as relying principally on official reports of bites. *Ibid.*, 316. This resulted in significant underreporting of bites.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 317. The survey included children in preschool to twelfth grade.

¹⁸¹*Ibid.*, 319. The study went on to find that children’s attitudes toward dogs were not affected by being bitten: “Children appear to accept being bitten by dogs much as they do other accidents such as falling off a bike. Being bitten had little influence on their liking for dogs.”

¹⁸²See *Ibid.*, 317–320.

¹⁸³Lee E. Pinckney and Leslie A. Kennedy, “Traumatic Deaths From Dog Attacks in the United States,” *Pediatrics* 69 (1982), 193. Only 48 percent of the newspapers responded.

¹⁸⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸CDC 1979–1988, *supra* note 91, 1489.

¹⁸⁹Pinckney and Kennedy, *supra* note 183, 195.

¹⁹⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁹¹*Ibid.*

¹⁹²See *infra* Part II.

¹⁹³See Pinckney and Kennedy, *supra* note 183, 195.

¹⁹⁴William G. Winkler, “Human Deaths Induced by Dog Bites, United States, 1974–75,” *Public Health Report* 92 (1977), 425.

¹⁹⁵The CDC authors criticized the Winkler study as being “anecdotal” rather than “systemic.” CDC 1979–1988, *supra* note 91, 1489.

¹⁹⁶Winkler, *supra* note 194.

¹⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 428.

¹⁹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹Jason W. Stull and Robert R. Hodge, “An Analysis of Reported Dog Bites: Reporting Issues and the Impact of Unowned Animals,” *Journal of Environmental Health* 62 (2000), 17.

²⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 19.

²⁰¹*Ibid.* The authors were truthful when they stated, “[f]or cases in which breed was given, pit bulls, German shepherds, and rottweilers combined were responsible for over 59 percent of bites each year.” Nevertheless, as a lawyer, I am concerned by scientists drawing this conclusion. Such statements can be taken out of context and used by the insurance industry and legislatures to justify breed discrimination and BSL when such actions are not supported by statistics.

²⁰²Lockwood and Rindy, *supra* note 83, 7 (“The genetics of canine aggression are still poorly understood...”).

²⁰³*Ibid.*

²⁰⁴Task Force, *supra* note 5, 1736, (citing J.C. Wright, “Canine Aggression Toward People: Bite Scenarios and Prevention,” *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice* 21 (1991), 299.

²⁰⁵Lockwood and Rindy, *supra* note 83, 7 (discussing the factors that can lead a dog to be aggressive).

²⁰⁶See *infra* Part V. for a discussion of dangerous dogs laws as an alternative to BSL and breed discrimination.

²⁰⁷CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 838. At the time of the study, Sacks and Gilchrist were with the CDC’s National Center for Injury and Control, Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention; Sinclair and Lockwood were with The HSUS; and Golab was with the American Veterinary Medical Association.

²⁰⁸Task Force, *supra* note 5, 1733.

²⁰⁹“Dalmatian Popularity May Spur

Increase in Bites, HSUS Says,” *DVM: The News Magazine of Veterinary Medicine* (Jan. 1997), 40.

²¹⁰The CDC authors noted, “[c]onsidering American Kennel Club registration data for rottweilers in parallel with fatality data for that breed indicates that as the breed has soared in popularity, so have rottweiler-related deaths.” CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 838–839.

²¹¹Pinckney, *supra* note 183.

²¹²*Id.* at 195.

²¹³Weiss, *supra* note 159, 51.

²¹⁴*Supra* Part II.A.

²¹⁵CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 838.

²¹⁶*Ibid.*

²¹⁷Task Force, *supra* note 5, 1733.

²¹⁸*Ibid.*

²¹⁹*See supra* notes 137–138 and 167 and accompanying text.

²²⁰Chang, *supra* note 173, 1704.

²²¹*See supra* notes 150–158 and accompanying text.

²²²*Ibid.*

²²³*U.S. Constitution*, art. I, § 2, cl. 3.

²²⁴*Department of Commerce v. United States House of Representatives*, 525 U.S. 316, 322 (1999).

²²⁵One study estimated that as of 1998 approximately 34.3 million homes had dogs and a total of 53.6 million dogs in the United States being kept as pets. *See* J. Karl Wise and Jih-Jing Yang, “Dog and Cat Ownership, 1991–1998,” *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 204(8) (1994), 1166, 1166–67.

²²⁶*Supra* Part II.

²²⁷*See*, for example, Pinckney, *supra* note 183; Winkler, *supra* note 194. The Winkler and Pinckney/Kennedy studies were also criticized by Sacks et al. for taking a more anecdotal, rather than systematic, approach to determining the relative dangerousness of breeds. *See* CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 91, 1489.

²²⁸John C. Wright, “Canine Aggression toward People: Bite Scenarios and Prevention,” *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice* 21(2) (1991), 299, 301.

²²⁹CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 839.

²³⁰David Brand, “Time Bombs on Legs,” *Time* (July 27, 1987), 60. Call me cynical, but I cannot envision drug dealers or gang members registering their dogs with the local municipality or the AKC.

²³¹American Kennel Club, “Register a Dog,” <http://www.akc.org/registration/registeradog.cfm> (accessed July 9, 2004).

²³²While there were approximately fifty-seven million dogs in the United States in 1990, only twelve million were registered with the AKC. Mark Derr, “The Politics of Dogs,” *Atlantic Monthly* (March 1990), 49, 50.

²³³*See* *ibid.*

²³⁴Lockwood & Rindy, *supra* note 83, 3.

²³⁵*Ibid.*

²³⁶Derr, *supra* note 232, 51.

²³⁷*Ibid.*, 52 (discussing interview with Joe W. Templeton, professor of veterinary pathology and genetics at Texas A&M University, in which Professor Templeton stated that scientists cannot distinguish between breeds by using genetic fingerprinting or examining chromosomes); *American Dog Owners Association, Inc. v. City of Lynn*, 533 N.E.2d 642, 644 (Mass. 1989) (“After trial, the [trial]

judge found that there is no scientific means, by blood, enzyme, or otherwise, to determine whether a dog belongs to a particular breed, regardless of whether ‘breed’ is used in a formal sense or not.”) Professor Templeton described one study in which two American Staffordshire terriers were compared with a whippet. The profile of one of the terriers more closely matched the whippet than the other terrier.

²³⁸CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 839.

²³⁹However, only some dogs have their “AKC papers.” *See supra* notes 231–233 and accompanying text.

²⁴⁰Katharine Dokken, “Dog Bite Statistics: Bad Logic,” <http://www.thedogplace.com/library/articles156.htm> (accessed June 1, 2004).

²⁴¹OVDO, *supra* note 51; *American Dog Owners Association, Inc.*, 533 N.E.2d at 644.

²⁴²Wright, *supra* note 228, 301; Task Force, *supra* note 5, 1733; Gershman, *supra* note 139, 916.

²⁴³CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 91, 1492.

²⁴⁴Dokken, *supra* note 240.

²⁴⁵Lockwood and Rindy, *supra* note 83, 2.

²⁴⁶“Find the Pitbull,” <http://www.pitbullsontheweb.com/petbull/findpit.html> (accessed June 1, 2004) (“Breed misidentification is a scary thing in a time breed specific legislation is growing...Pit [B]ull dogs are often blamed for dog attacks that may very well have been caused by another breed”).

²⁴⁷CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 838 (“even experts may disagree on the breed of a particular dog”).

²⁴⁸533 N.E.2d 642 (Mass. 1989).

²⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 644.

²⁵⁰CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 838 (stating that it is unclear how to count attacks by mixed-breed dogs).

²⁵¹*Ibid.*, 839.

²⁵²Task Force, *supra* note 5, 1736.

²⁵³Dokken, *supra* note 240 (“To go by statistics alone assumes that the majority of dog bites are reported and that the majority of breeds identified are correct”).

²⁵⁴There is reason to believe that incidents of “just cause” bites are not uncommon. The CDC described a series of incidents where nonfatal dog bites that involved “just cause.” Stated conversely, these are bites where the human “victim” is to blame. CDC Nonfatal, *supra* note 123.

²⁵⁵Dokken, *supra* note 240.

²⁵⁶Task Force, *supra* note 5, 1742.

²⁵⁷Brand, *supra* note 230.

²⁵⁸*Ibid.*

²⁵⁹*See*, for example, *ibid.*

²⁶⁰*Ibid.*

²⁶¹*Ibid.*

²⁶²*Ibid.*

²⁶³Brand, *supra* note 230.

²⁶⁴Lockwood and Rindy, *supra* note 83, 3.

²⁶⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶⁶OVDO, *supra* note 51.

²⁶⁷Brand, *supra* note 230, 60.

²⁶⁸*Ibid.*

²⁶⁹*Ibid.*

²⁷⁰Task Force, *supra* note 5, 1736.

²⁷¹*Ibid.*, 1732.

²⁷²*See supra* Part II.

²⁷³Task Force, *supra* note 5, 1736.

²⁷⁴*Ibid.*

²⁷⁵*Ibid.*

²⁷⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 1733.

²⁷⁸CDC 1989–1994, *supra* note 17, 894 (“Although several breeds appear over-represented in the population of animals involved in fatal attacks, this representation fluctuates over time. Thus, it may be unproductive to view this as a problem that is unique to any one breed”); CDC 1995–1996, *supra* note 93 (“Although some breeds were disproportionately represented in the fatal attacks described in this report, the representation of breeds changes over time. As a result, targeting a specific breed may be unproductive; a more effective approach may be to target chronically irresponsible dog owners”); CDC Nonfatal, *supra* note 94 (arguing for regulation of individual dogs over BSL).

²⁷⁹CDC Nonfatal, *supra* note 123; Lockwood and Rindy, *supra* note 83, 2 (describing BSL as “controversial” and attributing the problem to a lack of “good data” for the numerator and denominator).

²⁸⁰American Kennel Club, “Canine Legislation Position Statements,” <http://www.akc.org/love/dip/legislate/canleg.cfm> (accessed July 2003).

²⁸¹American Kennel Club, “American Kennel Club Statement on Dangerous Dogs,” <http://www.akc.org/love/dip/legislate/dangerous.cfm> (accessed June 8, 2004).

²⁸²Davis, *supra* note 58, 1.

²⁸³*Ibid.*

²⁸⁴Weiss, *supra* note 51; Lockwood, *supra* note 51, 276.

²⁸⁵Weiss et al., *supra* note 159, 51; Task Force, *supra* note 5, 1733. In contrast, the domestic cat has been with us for only about four thousand years. Gina Spadafori and Paul D. Pion, *Cats for Dummies*, 2d ed. Hoboken, N.J.: For Dummies, 2000, 14.

²⁸⁶*See infra* Part IV.

²⁸⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸⁸Wise and Yang, *supra* note 225.

²⁸⁹*Ibid.*

²⁹⁰Willing, *supra* note 6.

²⁹¹*Ibid.*

²⁹²*Ibid.*

²⁹³Task Force, *supra* note 5, 1739.

²⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 1733.

²⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 1739.

²⁹⁶*Ibid.*

²⁹⁷Susan D. Semmel, Comment, “When Pigs Fly, They Go First Class: Service Animals in the Twenty-First Century,” *Barry Law Review* 3 (2002), 39.

²⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 44.

²⁹⁹CDC 1995–1996, *supra* note 93, 466 (“Dogs provide many health and social benefits”).

³⁰⁰David T. Allen, “Effects of Dogs on Human Health,” *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 210(8) (1997), 1136, 1138.

³⁰¹*Ibid.*

³⁰²*Ibid.*

³⁰³Task Force, *supra* note 5, 1740.

³⁰⁴*See*, for example, “In Memory of Pets,” <http://www.in-memory-of-pets.com/> (accessed July 21, 2004); Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement, <http://www.aplb.org/> (accessed July 21, 2004).

³⁰⁵Willing, *supra* note 6.

³⁰⁶Wayne Hunthausen, “Effects of Aggressive Behavior on Canine Welfare,” *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*

(1997), 1134.
307Ibid.
308Ibid., 1135.
309Ibid.
310Ibid.
311Sodergren, *supra* note 59; McMahon, *supra* note 17, 03a.
312Sodergren, *supra* note 59.
313Ibid.
314See *infra* Part V.
315Robert R. Googins, “Fraud and the Incontestable Clause: A Modest Proposal for Change,” *Connecticut Insurance Law Journal* 2 51 (1996), 69 n. 86.
3162 Couch on Insurance § 31:10 (3d ed. 2004).
317Sentell v. New Orleans & C.R. Co., 166 U.S. 693 (1897).
318Ibid.
319Ibid.
320Ibid.
321Ibid., 694.
322Ibid., 696.
323Ibid., 694.
324Ibid. The Court noted, however, the dogs can be considered property for purposes of the tort of conversion.
325Ibid.
326Ibid.
327Ibid.
328Ibid., 694–695.
329Ibid. The Court’s distinction among full, incomplete, and no status is interesting, but ultimately irrelevant, as the Court held that even if dogs were considered complete property, they (like all forms of property) are subject to the police power of the state.
330Ibid., 696
331Bennett v. Bennett, 655 So. 2d 109 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1995).
332Arrington v. Arrington, 613 S.W.2d 565 (Tex. App. 1981).
333Bennett, 655 So. 2d at 110.
334Ibid.
335Ibid.
336Ibid.
337Arrington, 613 S.W.2d at 569.
338Ibid. In Texas family law a “managing conservator has the right to establish the child’s residence and has primary custody of the child. A possessory conservator typically has visitation rights under terms and conditions set by the court.” In re V.L.K., 24 S.W.3d 338, 340 n.1 (Tex. 2000) (citations omitted); see generally *Texas Family Code Annual* (2004) §§ 153.132, 153.371, 153.192.
339Arrington, 613 S.W.2d at 569.
340Ibid.
341Raymond v. Lachmann, 264 A.D.2d 340 (N.Y. App. Div. 1999).
342Ibid.
343Ibid.
344Ibid., 341.
345Corso v. Crawford Dog & Cat Hospital, Inc., 97 Misc.2d 530 (N.Y. Civ. Ct., Queens County 1979).
346Ibid.
347Ibid.
348Ibid., 530–31.
349Ibid., 531.
350Ibid.
351Bueckner v. Hamel, 886 S.W.2d 368, 370 (Tex. App. 1994).
352Ibid., 370.
353Ibid.

354Ibid.
355Ibid.
356Ibid., 371.
357Ibid., 373 (J. Andell concurring).
358Ibid.
359Ibid., 376.
360Ibid., 377.
361Ibid., 377–378.
362Willing, *supra* note 290.
363Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Central New York, Inc. v. McCall, 674 N.E.2d 1124, 1126 (N.Y. 1996) (hereinafter *Blue Cross & Blue Shield*). For further discussion of insurance as a “privilege” instead of a “right,” see 43, *American Jurisprudence 2d ed.*, Title Insurance (2004) § 23. “The organization of an insurance company and the conduct of the business of writing insurance is not a right but a privilege granted by the state, subject to the conditions imposed by it.” Ibid. § 24.
Regulation of the insurance industry is primarily a power of states, not the federal government. 43 *American Jurisprudence 2d ed.*, (2004) §§ 29, 30. The McCarran-Ferguson Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 1011–1015, declared that regulation of insurers by the states was in the public interest. 43 *American Jurisprudence 2d ed.*, (2004) § 30. McCarran-Ferguson creates a reverse preemption system where the power to regulate is vested in the states, not the federal government. Ibid. However, plans created under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) are still subject to joint federal-state regulation. John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Co. v. Harris Trust & Savings Bank, 510 U.S. 86 (1993) (“We are satisfied that Congress did not order the unqualified deferral to state law that Hancock both advocates and attributes to the federal lawmakers. Instead, we hold, ERISA leaves room for complementary or dual federal and state regulation, and calls for federal supremacy when the two regimes cannot be harmonized or accommodated”).
364Blue Cross & Blue Shield, 674 N.E.2d, 1126.
36543 *American Jurisprudence 2d ed.*, (2003) § 25.
366Bekken v. Equitable Life Assurance Society, 293 N.W. 200, 211 (N.D. 1940); 43 *American Jurisprudence 2d ed.*, (2003) §§ 24, 25.
367Bekken, 293 N.W., 209.
368Ibid., 210.
369Ibid., 211. (“It will be noted that the State, under its police power, in the interest of the general welfare, may regulate not only the business of insurance in a general way, but it may, also, regulate contracts of insurance, and in a large measure prescribe the terms and conditions of such contracts, and it may impose duties and obligations incident to the relation created by the contract or the negotiations for a contract different from those arising or existing under other contracts, and it may prohibit the parties from altering such duties or obligations.”). In *Bekken*, the North Dakota Supreme Court had to decide whether a beneficiary of a life insurance policy could enforce the policy even though the insurance company had not acted promptly in writing the policy before the deceased died. The Court held that the insurance company had breached its duty to act promptly on the deceased’s application and ordered the company to pay the beneficiary. Ibid., 218.

One court has stated, “Such regulation, even down to ‘the minutest particular in the interest of the public,’ has never been questioned.” *Blue Cross & Blue Shield*, 674 N.E.2d, 1126 (quoting *People v. Formosa*, 30 N.E. 492 [N.Y. 1892]).

370Greer v. Aetna Life Insurance, 142 So. 393, 395 (Ala. 1932) (“The generally recognized rule is that ‘in the absence of statutory prohibitions discriminations or rebating as to premiums is not illegal’”). In *Greer*, the state complained that Aetna’s policy of not charging higher premiums for mortgage insurance for older people (who pose a greater risk) in essence discriminated against the young. Ibid., 394–395. Since state law did not prohibit discrimination based on age or life expectancy, the Alabama Supreme Court held that the insurance company did not do anything illegal.

371Blue Cross & Blue Shield, 674 N.E.2d, 1126 (stating that the conduct of insurance companies is subject to conditions imposed by the state to promote public welfare).

37244 C.J.S. *Insurance* § 45 (1993).

373Ibid. § 66 (“The rates charged by insurance companies must not deviate from those established by state authority. Rates may not be unreasonable, excessive, inadequate, or discriminatory”). In states where rates are regulated, insurers bear the burden of proving the reasonableness of their rates. Ibid. § 69(b). Legislatures can prohibit discrimination against insureds of the same “class.” Ibid. § 64. Some states provide a private cause of action to enable insureds to recover for unfair trade practices or violations of rate regulations. Ibid. § 45.

37443 *American Jurisprudence 2d ed.*, § 43 (2003).

375Ibid. § 25. Most states require insurers to contribute to an “assigned risk plan” that writes “high-risk” policies for drivers who cannot get insurance in the free market, often because of DWI convictions. See, for example, *Texas Insurance Code Annotated* art. 21.81 (2004–2005).

376Deborah S. Hellman, “Is Actuarially Fair Insurance Pricing Actually Fair?: A Case Study in Insuring Battered Women,” 32 *Harvard Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Law Review* (1997), 355.

377Ibid., 410.

378Ibid., 356, 377–378.

379See *ibid.*, 358.

380Deborah A. Stone, “The Rhetoric of Insurance Law: The Debate over AIDS Testing,” *Law and Social Inquiry* 15 (1990), 385, 388.

381If a person cannot obtain health insurance, his or her health care costs shift to the public (through Medicare or Medicaid) or to hospitals, which may be required to treat every patient regardless of the ability to pay. In the latter case, the costs are likewise shifted to the public because hospitals must increase costs for paying customers (and their insurers) in order to make up for their losses from their nonpaying customers. Ibid., 390.

382In the case of breed discrimination, the latter results. If I had not been able to secure insurance with the Farm Bureau, I would have lost out on a significant economic opportunity—the ability to purchase a house. See *infra* Part V.B. for a discussion of insurance as gatekeeper to homeownership. In the alterna-

tive, I could have given up my dogs, which likewise would have been a significant loss of happiness and opportunity.

³⁸³See Stone, *supra* note 380, 386 (stating that insurance is the primary mode people provide for needs not affordable through normal work income).

³⁸⁴Brian J. Glenn, "The Shifting Rhetoric of Insurance Denial," *Law and Society Review* 34 (2000), 779, 782.

³⁸⁵Lee R. Russ and Thomas F. Segalla, *Couch on Insurance*, 3d ed. (1995) § 2, 1.

³⁸⁶Sonia M. Suter, "Disentangling Privacy From Property: Toward a Deeper Understanding of Genetic Privacy," *George Washington Law Review* 72 (2004), 737, 795 ("All states require underwriting decisions to be actuarially, or rationally, based; they cannot be arbitrary. Insurers must engage in good-faith practices in deciding whether to underwrite, at what rate, and for what conditions."); 43 *American Jurisprudence 2d ed.*, § 43 (2003) (underwriting and rate setting may take into account only legitimate cost factors). To some extent, this requirement is based on a prohibition of unfair trade practices, as enumerated in the model Unfair Trade Practices Act, developed by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners. See Unfair Trade Practices Act (National Association of Insurance Commissioners, 2001) (hereinafter UTPA). The NAIC, a nongovernmental organization of insurance regulators, drafted this model act to regulate unfair trade practices in the insurance industry. Most states have adopted UTPA in some form or another. See Stone, *supra* note 380, 392; Richard J. Wirth, "My Customer's Keeper: The Search for a Universal Suitability Standard in the Sale of Life Insurance," *New England Law Review* 24 (2002), 47, 79.

³⁸⁷Maryland Code Annotated - Insurance (2000) § 27-501(a)(1) (emphasis added).

³⁸⁸*Ibid.*, § 27-501(a)(2).

³⁸⁹Tom Baker, "Containing the Promise of Insurance: Adverse Selection and Risk Classification," *Connecticut Insurance Law Journal* 9 (2002/2003), 371, 377.

³⁹⁰Otherwise insurers would run a risk of low-risk consumers being priced out of the market and only high-risk insureds remaining, a danger known as the "death spiral." See Peter Siegelman, "Adverse Selection in Insurance Markets: An Exaggerated Threat," *Yale Law Journal* 113 (2004), 1223, 1224.

³⁹¹Baker, *supra* note 389, 373.

³⁹²Kenneth S. Abraham, *Distributing Risk: Insurance, Legal Theory, and Public Policy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), 67–68.

³⁹³Baker, *supra* note 389, at 377.

³⁹⁴See, for example, 43 *American Jurisprudence 2d ed.*, (2003) § 43.

³⁹⁵Hellman, *supra* note 376, 380.

³⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 378.

³⁹⁷Moral hazard is the change in incentives that can result because an individual is protected by an insurance contract. Baker, *supra* note 389, 373. Insureds without a sufficient personal investment in a particular risk—through co-insurance, for example—may be more likely to engage in the risky conduct in a negligent manner.

³⁹⁸Adverse selection is the tendency for low-risk insureds to drop out of insurance

pools altogether, unless administrators provide financial incentives for them to remain in the pools. *Ibid.*, 375–376.

³⁹⁹See Hellman, *supra* note 376, 380.

⁴⁰⁰See *Ibid.*, 380–381.

⁴⁰¹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰²*Ibid.*, 380 (noting that "statistical discrimination is justified when the social utility, including the cost to the insurer of employing a particular classification, could not be increased by further refinement of the classification," a view expressed by Steven Meitzen in "The Ethics of Statistical Discrimination," *Social Theory and Practice* 17 [1991], 23, 26).

⁴⁰³Frederick Schauer argues that BSL and breed discrimination are justified practices. Frederick F. Schauer, *Profiles, Probabilities, and Stereotypes* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 55–78. Schauer starts with the premise that there is a statistical correlation between pit bulls and unprovoked bites. *Ibid.*, 55 ("Looking at what evidence we have, it turns out that the generalizations underlying pit bull restrictions do indeed have the kind of empirical support that distinguishes them from purely spurious generalizations"). He then goes on to argue that BSL and breed discrimination, while both underinclusive and overbroad, are justifiable from the perspective of statistical correlation and the need to protect people from dangerous events. *Ibid.*, 59. As I have demonstrated, however, the correlation between breed and dangerousness is weak at best. See *supra* Part II. Schauer's citation for his proposition is several of the CDC studies that have been discussed in this article. Schauer, *supra*, at 59 n.7; see *supra* Part II. Yet, these very studies cautioned that their data were incomplete and that it would not be statistically sound to make generalizations about breeds. See *supra* Parts II & III.

⁴⁰⁴Task Force, *supra* note 5, 1737.

⁴⁰⁵Davis, *supra* note 58, 36 (quoting Alejandra Soto, spokesperson for the III).

⁴⁰⁶The practice of "drive-through deliveries" required doctors to discharge new mothers within hours after giving birth. Vicki Lawrence MacDougall, "Medical Gender Bias and Managed Care," *Oklahoma City University Law Review* 27 (2002), 781, 882, 892–894. States responded by passing laws requiring insurance companies to allow new mothers to stay in the hospital for a minimum period of time. Elizabeth C. Price, "The Evolution of Health Care Decision-Making: The Political Paradigm and Beyond," *Tennessee Law Review* 65 (1998), 619, 626. Connecticut, for example, passed a law that required insurance companies to pay for forty-eight hours of inpatient care following vaginal deliveries and ninety-six hours following caesarian deliveries. *Connecticut General Statutes Annotated* §§ 38a-503c, 38a-530c (West 2004). Congress, using its power to regulate ERISA-based insurance policies, followed suit by passing the Newborns' and Mothers' Health Protection Act of 1996, which included the 48-/96-hour rule that had been adopted by several states. Newborns' and Mothers' Health Protection Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-204, 110 Stat. 2874, 2935 (codified at 29 U.S.C. §§ 1185[a][1][A][i]-[ii] [2004]).

⁴⁰⁷Customers with preexisting medical conditions represent a high-risk class of

insureds. They are people likely to need additional care in the future. The market responded by charging higher rates for people with preexisting medical conditions or flat-out rejecting them for coverage. The result was that many people found themselves without insurance when they switched insurers. See Grey, *supra* note 17, 421 (insurers are given wide latitude to refuse to cover certain high-risk customers, absent state legislation or regulation to the contrary). Some states responded by passing legislation prohibiting insurers from refusing to provide coverage based on preexisting medical conditions. Connecticut requires health insurers to provide coverage for preexisting conditions if the person was previously covered by his or her preceding plan. *Connecticut General Statutes Annotated* §§ 38a-476 (West 2004).

⁴⁰⁸Legislatures have acted to protect consumers from discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, and other protected classes. Maryland, for example, has a relatively far-reaching statute prohibiting discrimination in underwriting based on race, color, creed, sex, blindness, or for any arbitrary or capricious reason. Maryland Code Annotated, Insurance § 27-501 (2004).

States have enjoined insurers from charging higher automobile insurance rates to men even though actuarial statistics show that women are a lower risk. For example, in *Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company v. Insurance Commissioner*, 482 A.2d 542 (Pa. 1984), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court held that the practice of charging different rates based on gender violated the state's statute, which prohibited "unfairly discriminatory" rates. *Ibid.*, 549. The Court looked to the purposes of the act and insurance regulation in general: to promote the public welfare. *Ibid.*, 547. The Court held, "[P]ublic policy considerations require more adequate justification for rating factors than simple statistical correlation with loss." *Ibid.*, 548 (quoting National Association of Insurance Commissioners, *Report of the Rates and Rating Procedures Task Force of the Automobile Insurance (D3) Subcommittee*, November 1978, 5–6 [footnotes omitted]).

A Michigan court declared unlawful the practice of refusing to write automobile insurance for adults under twenty-one unless they resided with parents. *Detroit Automobile Inter-Insurance Exchange v. Commissioner of Insurance*, 326 N.W.2d 444, 445 (Mich. Ct. App. 1982). The Court found that this practice violated the state's unfair trade practices law, which permitted refusing to insure a group "only if the cost is unreasonable." *Ibid.*, 447. The Court affirmed a central notion of insurance law that the free market is not the sole determinant of insurance rates. The court stated, "The mere fact that one group is more expensive to insure than another does not preclude fixing a reasonable rate."

Plaintiffs have also relied on federal law for relief against discrimination in the provision of homeowners' insurance. In *National Fair Housing Alliance, Inc. v. Prudential Insurance Company of America*, 208 F. Supp. 2d 46 (D.D.C. 2002), a U.S. district judge held that discrimination by a homeowners' insurance company on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, or national ori-

gin was made illegal by the Fair Housing Act and implementing regulations from HUD. *Ibid.*, 55–56.

⁴⁰⁹At least one court has stated, as a matter of public policy, that insurers may not engage in witness intimidation. In *L'Orange v. Medical Protective Company*, 394 F.2d 57 (6th Cir. 1968), an insurance company cancelled a dentist's malpractice policy after he testified against another dentist who was insured by the same company. *Ibid.*, 59. The court acknowledged that insurance policies are treated as voluntary contracts, but noted that they are also subject to public policy concerns. *Ibid.* In this diversity-of-citizenship case, the Court looked to the law of Ohio and found that the defendant-insurer had violated Ohio's public policy against witness intimidation. The Court noted the need for expert testimony, the existence of statutes against intimidating witnesses from testifying, and the potential chilling effect of the defendant's behavior, and awarded judgment to the dentist. *Ibid.*, 61–63.

⁴¹⁰Of course, if a person can purchase the house through cash on hand, then securing a mortgage is unnecessary and obtaining homeowners' insurance is "optional." A prudent homebuyer would nevertheless purchase homeowners' insurance to protect his or her investment in the event of catastrophic loss.

⁴¹¹978 F.2d 287 (7th Cir. 1992).

⁴¹²*Ibid.*, 297.

⁴¹³*Ibid.*, 290.

⁴¹⁴*Ibid.*, 298.

⁴¹⁵*Ibid.*, 297–298.

⁴¹⁶*Ibid.*, 290–291.

⁴¹⁷David H. Harris, Jr., "Using the Law to Break Discriminatory Barriers to Fair Lending for Home Ownership," *North Carolina Central Law Journal* 22 (1996), 101.

⁴¹⁸*Ibid.*

⁴¹⁹*Ibid.*

⁴²⁰Unless, of course, he is independently wealthy and does not need a mortgage.

⁴²¹Kansas physicians are required to carry malpractice insurance. Kansas Statute Annotated §§ 40-3402 (2000); State *ex rel. Schneider v. Liggett*, 557 P.2d 221 (Kan. 1978) (upholding Kansas's mandatory, state-run malpractice insurance program). Oregon requires attorneys to carry malpractice insurance. Oregon Revised Statutes § 9.080(2)(a) (2003).

⁴²²See, for example, New York Insurance Law § 5303 (McKinney 2003) (New York's assigned risk plan).

⁴²³Hospitals, Medicare and Medicaid, and health insurers would thus bear the cost for treatment. See Stone, *supra* note 380, 394 (making a similar argument regarding human diseases).

⁴²⁴See *ibid.*, 392.

⁴²⁵Baker, *supra* note 389, 376–378.

⁴²⁶See Lockwood and Rindy, *supra* note 83.

⁴²⁷In this respect, the use of the term "discrimination" is a bit of a misnomer. All forms of risk classification are acts of discrimination in a literal sense. See Hellman, *supra* note 376, 378 ("Because all insurer classifications are 'discrimination,' understood non-pejoratively, one must ask why use of this classification is 'plain, old fashioned,' 'profoundly unjust[,] and wrong[ful]' discrimination").

⁴²⁸Baker, *supra* note 389, 377.

⁴²⁹These are alternatives that could be col-

laborative endeavors among animal groups, governments, and insurers. At least one insurer, State Farm, has publicly stated its willingness to find proactive solutions to the problem of dog bites. See Hattaway, *supra* note 70.

⁴³⁰See, for example, Sacks et al., *supra* note 150, 53; CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 840; Winkler, *supra* note 194, 425.

⁴³¹Some scientists have suggested that some breeds are more dangerous because, when they do bite, their jaw structure and other physical characteristics cause them to inflict more pain and physical injury. See Lockwood and Rindy, *supra* note 83, 36.

⁴³²Brand, *supra* note 230, 60.

⁴³³Sacks et al., *supra* note 150, 53 (supporting enforcement of existing laws to regulate dangerous dogs and dog fighting); CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 840 (urging lawmakers to focus on problem owners, not dogs or breeds); CDC 1989–1994, *supra* note 17, 894 (same).

⁴³⁴American Kennel Club, "American Kennel Club Statement on Dangerous Dogs," <http://www.akc.org/love/dip/legislate/dangerous.cfm> (accessed Nov. 6, 2004).

⁴³⁵CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 840.

⁴³⁶See CDC 1989–1994, *supra* note 17, 894; CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 840.

⁴³⁷CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 840 ("[P]roblem behaviors [of dogs and owners] have preceded attacks in a great many cases and should be sufficient evidence for preemptive action").

⁴³⁸I would exclude from this category "just cause" bites, discussed *supra* at Part II.F.

⁴³⁹CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 840.

⁴⁴⁰Michigan Compiled Laws §§ 287.321, 287.322 (2004).

⁴⁴¹*Ibid.* § 287.322.

⁴⁴²*Ibid.* § 287.321(a). The law provides a number of exceptions to the definition of dangerous. An animal is not dangerous if: (1) the "victim" was a trespasser or provoked or tormented the dog; or (2) the animal was protecting a person or livestock.

⁴⁴³*Ibid.* § 287.321.

⁴⁴⁴Oklahoma Statutes title 4, §§ 44, 47 (2004).

⁴⁴⁵*Ibid.* § 46(b).

⁴⁴⁶CDC 1995–1996, *supra* note 93, 466.

⁴⁴⁷See CDC 1989–1994, *supra* note 17, 894–8995 ("[I]t is important to recognize that most of the 52 million dogs in this country never bite or kill anyone").

⁴⁴⁸Frederick Schauer argues that a system of individualized determination of dangerousness—that myself and others propose—is unsound. Schauer, *supra* note 403, 69–72. He states that such a system comes at a high social cost, since the State responds only after a dangerous dog attacks. He cites several examples, including the speed limit on highways, to show that BSL and breed discrimination are simply forms of acceptable, forward-looking regulation. While some drivers might be better than others, the State has set a maximum speed limit regardless of driver ability. This is a forward-looking or prophylactic attempt to prevent accidents, death, and injury before they happen. He also points to the regulation of doctors and lawyers as an example of how society legitimately controls behavior in advance in order to prevent dan-

gerous occurrences from happening in the first place. Schauer's analysis, however, fails to recognize that dogs are different. Speed limits come at a small social cost—drivers who can drive safely at faster speed limits are forced to get to their destinations later than they would have had the speed limits not existed. This is a small social cost that comes with a more significant, larger societal benefit (saving many lives). See Philip Shuchman, "It Isn't That the Tort Lawyers Are So Right, It's Just That the Tort Reformers Are So Wrong," *Rutgers Law Review* 49 (1997), 485, 523 (20 percent increase in highway fatalities after states given permission by the federal government to raise speed limits to 65). Similarly, an unlicensed or untrained person practicing law or medicine has an almost 100 percent certainty of causing damage to clients or patients. The social cost of not regulating those practices would be significantly high. Although the dog population is around fifty million, see *supra* notes 288–289 and accompanying text, only a handful of those dogs will bite a person. Fatalities for dog bites have hovered around seven per hundred million people per year. See *supra* Part II.A.1. Yet, the social cost of having forward-looking regulations—such as BSL and breed discrimination—comes at a very high cost to families that own dogs, particularly those that are seeking to purchase a home. See *supra* Part IV. Further, individualized, dangerous-dog prosecutions do have a prophylactic effect. Like tort law, dangerous-dog laws indirectly encourage owners to take reasonable steps to prevent injuries. In this respect, dangerous-dog laws can serve as a deterrence against negligent or intentional misdeeds.

⁴⁴⁹See Benjamin L. Hart and Lynette A. Hart, "Selecting, Raising, and Caring for Dogs to Avoid Problem Aggression," *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 210 (1997), 1129, 1131.

⁴⁵⁰*Ibid.* (neutering can reduce aggression).

⁴⁵¹See Gershman et al., *supra* note 139, 914 (finding a statistically significant relationship between number of bites and intact dogs).

⁴⁵²Hart and Hart, *supra* note 449, 1130.

⁴⁵³*Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁴*Ibid.* An aggressive dog, for example, might do well with an assertive family.

⁴⁵⁵This conclusion has been supported by several scientists. CDC 1989–1994, *supra* note 17, 894 (calling for education of bite victims and children); Sacks et al., *supra* note 150, 53 (education programs needed on dog behavior); CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 840 (education needed for children); Gershman, *supra* note 139, 916 (suggesting education programs for children as a method to reduce bites and other attacks); CDC 1995–1996, *supra* note 93, 466 (discussing public education as a strategy towards reducing bites); Task Force, *supra* note 5, 1739 (education is key); Hunthausen, *supra* note 306, 1135 (public education a necessary component of bite prevention). Education is also supported by the AKC. American Kennel Club, "American Kennel Club Statement on Dangerous Dogs," <http://www.akc.org/love/dip/legislate/dangerous.cfm> (accessed June 8, 2004). Other groups support heightened efforts to teach responsible dog ownership and dog safety. OVDO, *supra* note 51. Educa-

tion is also supported by the insurance industry. Hattaway, *supra* note 70, 1144 (“I believe that the insurance industry has a role in promoting responsible pet ownership, including education, to help reduce this national problem”); III, Dog Bite Liability, *supra* note 66 (recommending that homeowners educate their children not to approach a sleeping or eating dog).

⁴⁵⁶Simon Chapman, et al., “Preventing Dog Bites in Children: Randomised Controlled Trial of an Educational Intervention,” *British Medical Journal* 320 (2000), 1512–1513. Children are more likely than adults to be the victims of dog bites. CDC 1979–1988, *supra* note 91, 1490 (70 percent of fatal dog bites were in children under ten years old); Sacks and Kresnow, *supra* note 150, 52–53 (children account for approximately half of all people who seek medical attention for dog bites); CDC 1979–1998, *supra* note 94, 836 (most victims of fatal dog bites are children); CDC 1995–1996, *supra* note 93, 463 (80 percent of fatality victims were children); CDC Nonfatal, *supra* note 123 (children between five and nine years old are most likely to be victims of nonfatal dog bites).

Some have speculated that children are more likely to be victims than adults because of their small stature and inability to defend themselves. See CDC 1979–1988, *supra* note 91, 1492 (young and old are most at risk to be victims of fatal dog attacks).

⁴⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 1512.

⁴⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁹See *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 1513.

⁴⁶¹Daniel M. Sosin et al., “Causes of Non-fatal Injuries in the United States, 1986,” *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 24(6) (1992), 685, 686.

⁴⁶²Bonnie V. Beaver, “Human-Canine Interactions: A Summary of Perspectives,” *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 210(8) (1997), 1148, 1148.

⁴⁶³That would, I suppose, lead more people to get cats as pets. However, there is evidence to suggest that cat bites are more dangerous than dog bites because of the high rate of infection associated with them. See Los Angeles County Animal Care & Control, “Cat Bites,” <http://animalcontrol.co.la.ca.us/html/pages/poetownerinfo/Catbite.htm> (accessed June 9, 2004) (one million cat bites are reported each year in the United States; cat bites can be especially dangerous for children, the elderly, or those with suppressed immune systems); Cynthia B. Whitney, “Ouch!—More Than You Ever Wanted to Know About Cat Bites,” http://www.thecatssite.com/cat_snips/snips.php?a=bites (accessed June 8, 2004) (reporting that 80 percent of cat bites get infected and that one out of 170 people will be bitten by cats each year); NBC11.com, “Cat Bites Can Be Deadly: Woman Hospitalized After Bite,” <http://www.nbc11.com/print/2191468/detail.html?> (accessed May 9, 2003) (describing the ordeal of a woman who had a “brush with death” after being bitten by her cat; she required hospitalization for a week); *Sound Medicine*, “Dog versus cat bites,” <http://www.soundmedicine.iu.edu/archive/2002/quiz/animalBites.html> (accessed July 27, 2002) (50 percent of cat bites are

infectious, compared to 20 percent of dog bites; cat teeth can penetrate more deeply and transmit bacteria more easily). In spite of these data, however, the insurance industry has not tried to outlaw cats as pets. Why not?

⁴⁶⁴Beaver, *supra* note 461, 1148.

⁴⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes Annotated 3 § 459-507-A(d) (West 2004).

⁴⁶⁷A.B. 6761, 2003-2004 Sess. (N.Y. 2003).

⁴⁶⁸H.B. 174, 2003 Sess. (N.H. 2003).