

Texas

Public Protest of Breed Specific Legislation



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Pit bull advocates make a stand against recent ordinance in Madisonville.

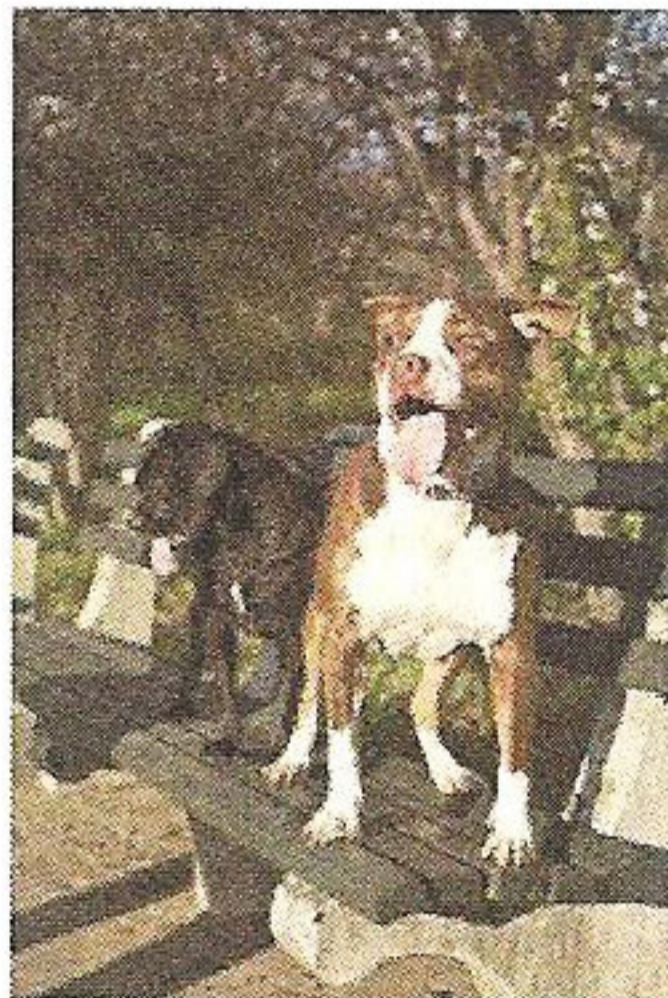
By Jennifer Hayes, Best Friends Network

One month ago the City Council of Madisonville, Texas passed an ordinance, essentially banning pit bulls, pit mixes, and vicious dogs. In order to keep the breeds of dogs mentioned in the new law, guardians are now required to purchase a \$30 city permit, a \$100,000 insurance policy, and adhere to strict kennel and muzzle restrictions. Noncompliance can result in a \$50 per day fine.

Members of [The Austin American Pit Bull Terrier Meet Up Group](#) drove approximately 150 miles to attend the Madisonville City Council meeting earlier this week to voice their opposition to the new ordinance.

Jessica Wilson was one of the Meet Up members who made the trip to let the City Council know that in addition to the law being unfair to the affected dogs and their guardians, the ordinance would not provide the protection desired. "BSL [breed specific legislation] has failed everywhere that it has been implemented, and we went to town hall to suggest other alternatives, such as education and enforcing the city's current leash law." To help make their point, the group's Co-Organizer, Lydia Zaidman, had assembled a packet of educational materials, which she left for the council to examine.

"As a responsible and proud owner of an Amstaf [American Staffordshire terrier], I feel that this ban will only affect those who are responsible individuals, who give the love that an animal deserves, who trains and continues to train their dog to ensure that your pet/best friend is aware of the rules," notes David Coulter, who also spoke against the ordinance. "Those that hurt, fight, and are just totally negligent owners are not going to care that another law has been passed, it is not going to open their eyes to the inhumane acts that they are already pursuing. So all this law is going to do is hurt those that do right by their pets. If this law ever made its way to Austin I would move, you are not taking my baby from me, she is my life; she gives nothing but love and only desires the love back."

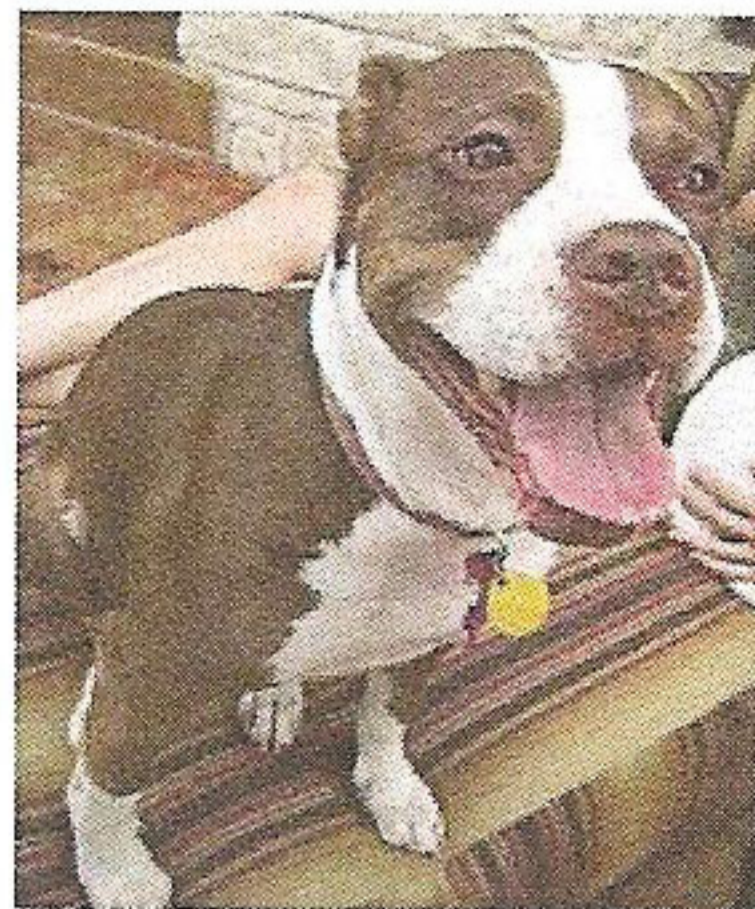


Meet Up member Dawn Csernai member spoke to the Madisonville City Council too. She commented that a specific breed should not be targeted. Spot, her pit bull of eight years, has never harmed another dog. In fact, dogs of other breeds have attempted to attack him in the past. Though the town of Madisonville is far from her Austin home, she felt the need to voice her opposition for fear that if the law is allowed to stay on the books, other town councils may pass similar legislation. She notes, "This could affect anyone. It could affect Austin or Dallas or Houston."

In addition to addressing the council and providing resources, Zaidman sent a letter to the City Council members following the meeting. She closed with, "If your goal was to make people 'feel' like you were doing something, you might have succeeded. However, if you really want to help the citizens of Madisonville, without punishing the citizens who have committed no crime, I would suggest a mandatory spaying and neutering law (for all breeds), which can be done for a very low cost; an anti-tethering law; and cracking down hard on those who abuse animals through dog fighting."

Local residents were not without representation. Alisha Badillo and her friend Christina Abel both attended this week's meeting to speak against the new ordinance. Prior to the evening, Badillo had already contacted two Council members, the City Manager, and written a letter to the editor to voice her disapproval. She has a lot to lose if the law remains as written, since her dogs Bruno and Lady are both pit bulls. "I love my dogs; they are a part of my family. My kids consider them their sister and brother."

Before her marriage, Badillo had been unfamiliar with the breed; however, they were her husband's dog of choice. Now she says, "They've been great dogs, but now I just love them. I prefer them to any type of dog. They're so loving, they really are." Her children, ages six and nine, play catch, wrestle and even ride the dogs and she has never seen any negative reaction. The family even bought their current house to accommodate the dogs, due to the fully fenced almost full acre yard.



However, the new Madisonville ordinance puts her canine family in jeopardy. She priced the mandated 10'x10' covered pen with a minimum 3" concrete floor and the cost of materials alone was \$500. She and many of the other town's residents are unable to afford the additional expense. Not that she would be willing to cage her dogs in such a small enclosure; the confinement would be unfair to her dogs who have become accustomed to running around the entire yard. Her homeowner's insurance already includes the necessary coverage, but she has learned others attempting to find liability insurance to pay for any injury or damage caused by a dog is difficult.

This city meeting was the first Badillo has ever attended because, "This is the first time I've had to stand up for something." When she spoke,

she noted that the ordinance is wrong and should not single out a particular breed. The town's residents will not be able to comply with all of the ordinance stipulations and she stated her belief that if they enact a law, it should apply to all breeds of dogs. A petition with almost 100 names of residents was presented at the meeting and she plans to provide copies of petitions containing an additional 200 signatures to all the council members this week.

That evening, Mayor Dean commented that he did not want to create hardship for the citizens, but also stated that he did not think the ordinance contained breed specific legislation. Badillo believes the town's council will take the input and educational materials into consideration and make appropriate changes to the ordinance. "We live in a small town and because of that, I would like to see that this is resolved quickly and easily." For now she will keep her dogs, wait, and hope.

BSL is illegal in Texas, per the [Texas Health and Safety Code Title 10 Chapter 822, Section 822.047](#). The code states "A county or municipality may place additional requirements or restrictions on dangerous dogs if the requirements or restrictions: (1) are not specific to one breed or several breeds of dogs; and (2) are more stringent than restrictions provided by this subchapter."

"Discrimination was a part of our nation's past and should not be allowed to be a part of our present or future," notes Meet Up member Eric Alvarado. "All discrimination, against people or animals, should be stopped. At one time my race was banned from most places in this county. I thought we had learned from our nation's past, but we are repeating mistakes of our past rather than learning from them. We should not judge the entire breed of pit bulls by the actions of a few dogs. As with humans, there are both good and bad out there. We should reward the good pit bull owners and punish the bad ones."

How to help:

- Sign the [online petition](#) against the City of Madisonville's BSL.
- Contact Madisonville city officials to oppose this ordinance.

Madisonville City Hall
210 West Cottonwood
Madisonville, Texas 77864
Telephone: 936-348-2748
Fax: 936-348-3815

- Mayor Don Dean: PO Box 7 Madisonville, Texas 77864, Phone 936-348-1083
- Mayor Pro Tem Marvin Stanton: Phone 936-349-0000
- City Councilmember Lois Brown: Phone 936-348-6003
- City Councilmember Terri Creel: Phone 936-348-7136
- City Councilmember Debra Drake: Phone 936-348-6419
- City Councilmember Pearline Johnson: Phone 936-348-5983

For the rest of the story:

- [KBTX.com: Pro-Pit Bull People Travel to Madisonville Meeting](#)
- [Pit-thetic](#)

For more information:

- [Ordinance to Regulate the Keeping of Pit Bull Breed Dogs and Other Vicious Dogs Within the City of Madisonville, Texas](#)
- [Stop Breed Specific Legislation Campaign](#)
- [Pit Bulls – the real story](#)

Photo credit: photos provided courtesy of Lydia Zaidman. The lead photo pictures Zaidman with her pit bull Mocha, who is also the dog featured for May 2008 in [The Unexpected Pit Bull calendar](#).