

Hello Mayor, Council members, and Officials of Vermilion. Thank you for your time in hearing my statement today.

I've lived in Vermilion all of my life and recently purchased my first home here. I couldn't picture living anywhere else. I currently live alone, but I've recently had the privilege of bringing a puppy named Barton into my home, and we've been on a great adventure together. We've met many new people and fellow dog lovers on our trips in town, all of whom have loved meeting Barton and consistently compliment how friendly and well-mannered he is. I am also thrilled there are two fantastic, small-business dog and pet stores within walking distance of my house, and Barton and I have visited them during our adventures in town.

Sadly, I've learned through some of those meetings, and my own research, that Barton and I face challenges that other dogs and owners will not - Breed-Specific Language (commonly referred to as 'BSL'), that places undue restrictions and bans on him and his kind.

You see, Barton is an American Pit Bull Terrier, part of a group of breed varieties commonly called "pit bulls". A breed with a tragic history of being exploited in animal blood sports because of their physical build and inherent loyalty to please their owner - even at the cost of the dog's own lives. These activities have, thankfully, long since been made a felony in the US and illegal in much of the world, yet the stigma on these animals and resulting laws against them are still very present across much of the country. These laws range from mandatory sterilization and other restrictions, to outright bans on ownership and confiscation or destruction of the animal if discovered - oftentimes regardless of the animal's temperament, history, or training. Thankfully, Vermilion does not impose such strict measures as bans or animal destruction, but it does list the "pit bull" group (and only dogs of that group) as vicious, indeed regardless of the animal's ability to prove otherwise. This definition puts Barton and his relatives in the same legal category as a dog that in fact has a history of aggression, biting, or harm. There is a lower legal tolerance, and fewer privileges and freedoms for myself and Barton, for no greater reason than his breed.

It's my observation that these kinds of laws, although originally well-intended, were conceived out of ignorance, and are now an archaic, inadequate solution to the original problem of bloodsports that they once sought to address. With a breed so prevalent as the pit bull, these laws punish the overwhelming majority of owners and dogs alike, who have never done anything wrong.

The ASPCA's official position on BSL supports this claim, as do numerous studies conducted on the efficacy of such laws. As early as 2000, the CDC found that such laws were ineffective, and even counterproductive, and recommended against breed-specific language in laws defining dangerous dogs. The State of Ohio, at-large, has aligned with these findings, as in 2012 it removed breed-specific language in its statute. Still, local municipalities have been slow to follow suit. In 2017 the Ohio 5th District Court of Appeals ruled against the breed-specific language in the city ordinance of Reynoldsburg's that banned the ownership of "pit bulls", which also deemed them vicious by default.

In talking with the owners of the pet stores I've mentioned, their patrons, and fellow dog owners, a number of them share my observation on BSL and have kindly signed their name to a list supporting my proposal here today.

Therefore, I am asking that the city council of Vermilion move to amend the Vermilion Codified Ordinance, by removing section 618.01 (a) (4) A. 3. which defines a vicious dog as one that: "Belongs to a breed that is commonly known as a pit bull dog. The ownership, keeping or harboring of such a breed of dog shall be prima-facie evidence of the ownership, keeping or harboring of a vicious dog."

Removing this section will align Vermilion with the State of Ohio as a whole and the many Ohio cities that have already followed suit. This will also ensure that the well-established definitions and penalties for dangerous and vicious dogs remain intact, while removing the breed-specific language, and allowing the law to be correctly focused on a dog and handler's actions.

I thank you for your kind attention, and I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions or to further this discussion.