

TO: Alexandria City Council & Mayor Justin Wilson
FROM: Alexandria Landlord-Tenant Relations Board
DATE: November 28, 2022
SUBJECT: Dog Breed Restrictions in Housing

Although Virginia law prohibits municipal dog breed restrictions, private landlords may still discriminate against breeds that are wrongly believed to be aggressive. That [typically includes](#) breeds such as bully breeds (Pit Bull Terriers, Staffordshire Terriers, Bull Terriers), German Shepards, Rottweilers, Mastiffs, and others (ASPCA). According to the [American Veterinary Medical Association](#), dog breed is not a predictor of aggression (AVMA). Rather, dog's social histories and irresponsible owner handling are the main causes of aggressive behavior. Breed restrictions in housing are regressive policies that ban specific breeds, have [roots in racism and redlining](#), are not based in science, do not promote [public safety](#), and ultimately cause discrimination in housing (Linder; Best Friends). **The Landlord-Tenant Relations Board (LTRB) recommends that the Alexandria City Council extend the state prohibition on breed restrictions to housing units within the city, if doing so is not prohibited by the Dillon Rule.** If this action is prohibited by the Dillon Rule, then the LTRB asks City Council to promote guidelines for corporate and individual landlords that discourages against including breed restrictions in leases.

Racist ideas about non-white people, in particular Black and Latino people, have led to cultural beliefs that these groups are more likely to own dangerous breeds — breeds that often show up on breed ban lists (Linder, 61). These perceptions have undergirded breed restrictions in many communities, and have functioned as a form of de facto redlining (Best Friends). Although there are no statistics that correlate racial demographic and breed ownership, the historical intent of breed bans (and especially pitbull bans) has been to exclude those dogs owners from housing (Nair).

There is no scientific evidence that any particular dog breed is more aggressive than others. The Centers for Disease Control, National Canine Research Council, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and other experts all assert that there is [no evidence](#) to support dog breed discrimination (Humane Society). Breed alone is not responsible for a dog's aggression or likelihood to bite (Mikkola, et al.). Rather, a confluence of factors contributes to potential aggression, including early socialization, environment, and owner handling.

Some tenants circumvent breed restrictions by having their pet declared an emotional support animal (ESA) or a service animal. [Any dog breed can be a service dog](#), underscoring that there is no evidence to support that any breed is more aggressive than any other (ADA National Network), and inflexible, blanket bans may constitute a [violation](#) of the Fair Housing Act (Humane Society). However, access to doctors or therapists and service dog training can be expensive, meaning this option is not accessible to lower-income tenants. Removing breed restrictions altogether would eliminate the issue of access for those who cannot afford to get ESA accommodation letters. We believe that everyone deserves access to housing, and no one should be

forced to give up a safe and loved family pet without a bite history simply because of the pet's breed. Breed restrictions are outdated and create an unnecessary barrier to affordable housing.

Respectfully,

The Alexandria Landlord-Tenant Relations Board

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