

Michael B. Hancock
Mayor



City and County of Denver

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February 14, 2020

Council President Clark and members of City Council:

Over the past several days, I have heard from thousands of residents passionately expressing their opinions on both sides of this issue. I want to thank everyone who has shared their views, especially those I have spoken to personally—experts in veterinary care, animal care and control, as well as residents of our city who have had experiences with the pit bull breeds—all to gain a broader understanding of what this change would mean for our community and those who own these dogs. After deep reflection and consideration, I find that I cannot, in good conscience, support this legislation and will exercise my authority as Mayor to veto it.

Let me say at the outset that I salute the sponsor of this ordinance, Councilman Herndon, and his fellow Council members, who have tried to craft legislation that creates a data and licensing system for these breeds that is supported by veterinary experts and encourages owners of pit bull breeds to manage their pets. Unfortunately, less than 20 percent of all pets in Denver are currently licensed, which raises significant questions about the effectiveness of this proposed new system. While much progress has been made in recent years to increase that number, more intentional efforts around responsible pet ownership, dog licensure and registration, and off-leash dogs are needed before this proposal should be considered. The reality is that irresponsible pet owners continue to be a problem, and it is the irresponsible owners and their dogs I must consider in evaluating the overall impact of this ordinance.

We cannot diminish the very real, very traumatic experiences of those who have reached out to me to share their stories. While I appreciate the effort that Councilman Herndon has put in to crafting this ordinance and its guardrails, I do not believe this ordinance fully addresses the very real risk to severe injury that can result from attacks from these particular dog breeds, especially should they happen to a child.

At the end of the day, I must ask whether passage of this ordinance would make our homes and neighborhoods safer or pose an increased risk to public safety? I have concluded that it would pose an increased risk. I encourage members of City Council to reconsider their approach to this ordinance, which has been in the municipal code for over three decades. If we were to make this change now, and harm comes to someone as a result, then we have done a disservice to the people of this great city.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Hancock", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Michael B. Hancock
Mayor