From: Amy Calmann
To: dencc - City Council
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Repeal the Ban
Date: Sunday, February 16, 2020 2:46:24 AM

Dear City Council members of Denver,

I am a psychotherapist in New York City. I see the damage that is done by the stigmatizing, bullying, discrimination and marginalizing of certain people in our society. I see firsthand the trauma that is inflicted and the deep impact it can have on a person's sense of security, identity, and development. Damage that is caused by fears and not fact. Damage that is caused by ignorance instead of education.

A decision to keep a ban in place on one group - whether it is a group of people or dogs - only causes harm and perpetuates bias. It causes unfair and cruel prejudice against a certain group, and does irreversible destruction to those in the group.

You all have the power to right the wrongs of 30 years of injustice and cruelty. Very sadly, Denver has a history of failing the dogs and the people of your community for three decades. If you vote to uphold the pit bull ban, you are letting down everyone - not just pit bull advocates and pit bull owners. This is a missed opportunity to fight long standing bias, and it ultimately hurts all people and all dogs.

Without a repeal of the pit bull ban, you are listening to fears and stereotyping, much like what has occurred with racism, sexism and xenophobia. The oppression of pit bulls is not keeping you or anyone else any safer. If you believe you are more secure, facts will tell you that this is a false sense of safety.

Upholding the ban would mean that you are choosing not to listen to facts and science. You are choosing not to listen to all of the professionals who testify that breed bans do not make people and cities safer. As elected officials, you are clearly smart and educated people who care about the public. The public is trusting you to use your intelligence and balanced thinking to make decisions based on evidence and not conjecture, fear mongering and media stories.

Breed does not predict violence. Pit bulls are not a breed anyhow. One of these pit bull type dogs, the American pit bull terrier, passes the American temperament testing society exam at a higher rate than many other dogs. They show less aggression than Golden retrievers, Yorkies, Beagles, Chihuahuas, Dalmatians, and Collies. American pit bull terriers are one of the highest scoring dog breeds tested, among a hundred plus breeds.

I would be very concerned that the mayor of your city believes he has the power and authority to stomp on the rights of your city council, and to ignore the voting process that was put in place to be fair and to be representative of the people of your city.

Mayor Hancock's choice to use a veto to block a repeal of the pit bull ban that was already voted upon by council members demonstrates an abuse of authority. Although the mayor may be within his right to veto a bill, I surely would not want to adhere to a mayor who ignores the votes of you and your fellow council members. The mayor is essentially saying that you can't be trusted to make a decision, so he will do it for you.

If you choose to uphold the pit bull ban, you are allowing irresponsible and abusive dog owners to dictate your decision. It is those people who will benefit from this ban for even more years, as so much money and effort and resources are wasted in trying to uphold the ban. And unfortunately, a breed ban mainly detrimentally affects the law abiding citizens of your city. The people who suffer are those who want to register their dog for a license, keep up with vaccines, and who treat their dog like a family member.

On a personal note, I adopted a pit bull from the Brooklyn NY shelter 4 1/2 years ago. Stevie Nicks is a therapy dog who sees patients with me in my private practice, on a weekly basis. It is truly extraordinary to watch both adolescents and adults open up to Stevie in a way that they could not with humans. Many of my patients are survivors of trauma, and have severe difficulties relating to people. But they often develop a bond with Stevie that gives them the comfort needed to express their thoughts and feelings, and work on grieving and healing.

Stevie and I also speak at New York City schools throughout the year, where we discuss bullying, breed bans and discrimination, animal safety, therapy dog work, and adoption of shelter and rescued animals. Many of these children have been victims of bullying, racism, and assaults on their religion, gender, etc, and they can relate to Stevie because of the history of bullying of her breed and the unfair stereotyping that she has endured too.

The kids adore spending time with Stevie, hugging her, reading books to her, and teaching her commands. And it is incredibly inspiring to see that children are so accepting of a pit bull type dog. They are determined not to judge a dog based on their appearance, just like they don't want to be judged based on their own appearance. These children have the capacity to understand breed bans and how harmful they are, in a way that adults often cannot.

Before Stevie came into my life, my first pit bull was adopted when I was 22 years old from the Manhattan NY shelter, and she had a beautiful 13 years with me. I spend much time around dogs volunteering, training and rescuing them. And I've honestly never met another breed of dog that is so intuitive, and so sensitive to people. There is no other type of dog that I would choose to have as part of my family.

You can check out my life with Stevie Nicks @stevienicksbull . Please repeal the pit bull ban and allow all dogs to be judged based on who they are - and not what they look like. Thank you for listening.

My best,
Amy Calmann

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