

ANIMAL LIMIT LAWS: BETTER ALTERNATIVES



**AMERICAN
KENNEL CLUB®**



THE AKC'S POSITION STATEMENT ON THE RIGHT TO KEEP AND ENJOY DOGS

The human-canine bond predates history. Since the dawn of civilization, people have enjoyed the companionship and assistance of dogs. Dog ownership has existed in all cultures, races, climates and economic situations — by monarchs, monks, nomads and peasants.

The American Kennel Club® strongly endorses the right to own, keep and breed dogs in a responsible and humane manner. We believe that responsible dog ownership is compatible with most living arrangements. The AKC® opposes unreasonable limitations on pet ownership, such as the prohibition of dogs for residents of senior citizen and government-subsidized housing facilities.

The American Kennel Club recognizes the special obligation of dog owners, not only to their pets but also to their neighbors. The AKC supports “curbing” and clean-up ordinances, leash laws, nuisance laws, and other reasonable regulations designed to ensure that dogs and their owners remain respected members of their communities.

WHAT IS A “LIMIT LAW?”

A limit law is a restriction on the number of animals an individual or household may own. These laws are usually passed on the city or county level and vary greatly from one community to the next. Sometimes limit laws stem from one problem owner who lets his or her dogs run loose or allows them to bark incessantly. Other times a string of incidents caused by irresponsible dog owners is the spark. Whatever the impetus, many communities often look to a quick fix — limiting the number of dogs allowed per household.

This trend presents a wealth of problems for the purebred dog fancy. Worse, though, are the problems limit laws cause the communities that propose them. Limit laws are introduced as a cure-all for animal control problems, but in reality they are typically unsuccessful and often create more problems than they solve.

But what makes limit laws so ineffective, and how can purebred dog owners and legislators help alleviate the problems that often lead to their introduction? What are some alternative solutions to the very legitimate animal control problems many communities face? The following are some important points to keep in mind when dealing with this issue.

LIMIT LAWS ARE NOT THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO SOLVE ANIMAL CONTROL PROBLEMS.

- Limiting the number of dogs an individual may own is an ineffective solution to animal control problems because it fails to address the heart of the issue — irresponsible ownership. Whether they own five dogs or two, irresponsible owners will still allow their animals to run loose, leave their mess in a neighbor's yard, or bark long into the night.
- Limit laws are extremely difficult to enforce and can be evaded by irresponsible animal owners. For example, individuals may choose not to license their pets as a way to avoid regulation. Animal control officers therefore have no way of knowing how many pets an owner has unless they make regular door-to-door inspections. To do so would be an expensive, time-consuming process that in many cases would require a search warrant. Fewer licenses also means less revenue for city government.
- Limit laws often force caring, responsible owners to surrender their excess animals to shelters that are already overcrowded, thereby increasing a city's shelter population problems and euthanasia rates.
- Hoping to evade limit laws, people may try to hide the number of dogs they own. To do so, owners avoid taking their animals to veterinarians and getting needed vaccinations. This may affect rabies prevention and threaten public safety. It also jeopardizes animals' health.
- In many cases, communities already have nuisance laws in place that, if properly enforced, could reduce animal control problems. Passing new laws is a lengthy, expensive process that only burdens public officials and taxpayers without resolving the issue at hand.



SUCCESS STORY #1

Comal County, Texas

When a dog attack prompted Comal County officials to propose a limit law, members of the Responsible Pet Owners Alliance (RPOA) swung into action. Understanding that the commissioners were in “attack mode” and strongly in favor of limiting animal ownership as a means of solving their animal control problems, RPOA offered assistance and alternative solutions rather than aggressive arguments. The group provided county officials with a copy of San Antonio’s reasonable, enforceable nuisance law and also explained how a limit law would negatively impact rescue groups. In addition, RPOA garnered support from the media, particularly local radio stations who covered the story in regular news updates. As more concerned dog owners learned about the proposal, opposition grew. Officials soon opted to follow RPOA’s suggestions, and the limit law died. The dog community’s rational, helpful approach clearly found favor among the Comal County Commissioners, and RPOA continues to serve as a valuable resource to legislators throughout Texas.

LIMIT PROPOSALS ARE UNFAIR TO RESPONSIBLE DOG OWNERS AND BREEDERS.

- Limit laws target all owners, regardless of their actions or the behavior of their animals. Responsible owners should be allowed to use their discretion in determining the number of dogs they can keep on their own property.
- A limit on the number of dogs one can own would restrict the many responsible breeders who raise and breed purebred dogs for the purpose of showing. These breeders make a serious commitment to their animals, not to make a huge profit, but instead to improve the individual breeds.
- Limit laws would impact the many responsible fanciers who rescue unwanted animals and either personally adopt them as pets or find them permanent homes.



SUCCESS STORY #2

East Camden, Arkansas

When stray dogs became a big problem for officials in East Camden, a limit law was proposed as a means of resolving the issue. Legislators were unaware, however, that a limit law would only add to the problem by taking away potential homes and loving foster families for homeless animals. Additionally, the proposal did not include a grandfather clause, meaning that countless residents who already owned more than four animals would have to relinquish their pets to overcrowded shelters or have them euthanized.

Members of the South Arkansas Kennel Club decided to take action. They attended city council meetings proudly wearing name tags to identify their cause. To gather community support, they created posters detailing the ordinance and the ways that it would affect pet owners. They also went door-to-door to talk with residents personally. Concerned dog owners quickly joined the fight and implemented a unique strategy: They showed up at city hall in droves to license their dogs. As a result, officials came to understand that if current laws were better enforced, the city would have the revenue to improve its animal control program. They also discovered that alternatives to limit laws would offer better solutions to their problems.

BETTER SOLUTIONS ARE AVAILABLE.

- Strongly enforced animal control laws, nuisance regulations requirements for pet owners to be respectful of neighbors and society, and increased public education efforts are all better ways to address the issue of irresponsible dog ownership.
- Effective leash and curbing laws can prevent irresponsible owners from letting their pets run loose, possibly endangering the public and other animals.
- Clean-up ordinances, as well as noise, odor, and nuisance regulations, can require all pet owners to take responsibility for their animals and recognize their obligations to society.
- For those who do violate nuisance laws, alternative sentencing in the form of community service at an animal shelter or participation in obedience or Canine Good Citizen classes may help correct irresponsible behavior.
- Use of an arbitrator to mediate neighborhood animal disputes can help settle personal arguments that are not indicative of an animal control problem.
- Public education initiatives to help teach community residents how to properly care for and interact with pets, as well as the need to be a courteous neighbor can have a positive impact.



SUCCESS STORY #3

Hamilton County, Ohio

While skimming the newspaper one day, a member of the Ohio Valley Dog Owners (OVDO) ran across an upsetting article. The story involved a neighborhood dispute over a breeder's kennel — the mere presence of which irritated residents. Although the kennel was clean, neat and legally zoned, neighbors had complained to their public officials. As a result, Hamilton County commissioners were asking their planning commission to explore the feasibility of a limit law.

Alarmed, the Ohio fancier immediately phoned an acquaintance on the planning staff and asked that two members of OVDO be included in the limit law task force. She also suggested that the group invite a veterinarian to participate. Over the next few weeks, members of OVDO worked to show public officials that there is no direct link between a specific number of dogs and the amount of nuisance they create — that one poorly trained dog can cause more problems than four well-behaved ones. The planning staff came to realize that, as is often the case with limit law issues, this proposal had stemmed not from an animal control problem but from a community argument that could have been resolved through mediation rather than through passage of new laws.

OVDO's efforts clearly paid off. The group not only defeated the limit law in favor of nuisance law enforcement, they also gained ground for breeders' rights and fair zoning regulations. In the past five years, these issues have not resurfaced in Hamilton County, attesting to the fact that an organized, efficient opposition campaign — mounted before legislation has been passed — can be extremely successful.

THE PUREBRED DOG FANCY AND THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB ARE VALUABLE RESOURCES.

- The AKC and its local dog clubs are committed to ensuring that effective animal control laws are fair, effective and promote responsible dog ownership. To help achieve these goals, dog fanciers often assist the community by serving on or starting animal control advisory boards to monitor animal-related problems and develop reasonable solutions. Many volunteer their time and resources to help start or improve public education campaigns to teach responsible dog ownership.
- The AKC's Government Relations and Public Education Departments also support communities in many ways. The Government Relations Department (919-816-3720, doglaw@akc.org) can provide sample legislation and help improve animal control laws. The Public Education Department offers free materials to schools, dog clubs, shelters and community organizations to help educate the public about responsible dog ownership (Contact the AKC's Customer Service Department at 919-233-9767 for more information). More information is also available online at www.akc.org.

Legislators and responsible dog owners have a shared interest in making sure that neighborhoods remain safe, enjoyable places for both people and dogs. By working together, government officials and the public can find workable, enforceable solutions to animal control problems without resorting to limit laws.





**For more information, contact the
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