

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2009 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 901
Judiciary

(Delegate McComas, *et al.*)

Domestic Violence - Cruelty Toward a Pet or Service Animal

This bill authorizes a District Court Commissioner, when issuing an interim protective order, or a court, when issuing a temporary or final protective order, to order relief relating to a pet or service animal of the person eligible for relief or a family member.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill's changes can be implemented and enforced with existing resources.

Local Effect: The bill's changes can be implemented and enforced with existing resources.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: A court may order the respondent to remain away from the pet or service animal of the person eligible for relief or of a family member. The court may also order the respondent to refrain from cruelty or aggravated cruelty toward the pet or service animal. If the respondent has possession of the pet or service animal, the court may order the respondent to give the pet or service animal to the person eligible for relief, a family member, or a suitable third party.

A "pet" is a domesticated animal and does not include livestock. A "service animal" means a guide or signal dog or other animal individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability, including: (1) guiding individuals with impaired

vision; (2) alerting individuals with impaired hearing; (3) providing minimal protection or rescue work; (4) pulling a wheel chair; or (5) fetching dropped items.

A person who violates a provision in an interim, temporary, or final protective order relating to a pet or service animal is guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to maximum penalties of a \$1,000 fine and/or 90 days imprisonment for a first offense and a \$2,500 fine and/or one-year imprisonment for a second or subsequent offense.

Current Law: A petition for an interim protective order may be filed with a District Court Commissioner if the clerk of the circuit court or clerk of the District Court is not open for business. If the commissioner finds there are reasonable grounds to believe that the respondent has abused a person eligible for relief, the commissioner may issue an interim protective order. If, after a hearing on a petition, whether *ex parte* or otherwise, a judge finds that there are reasonable grounds to believe a person eligible for relief has been abused, the judge may issue a temporary protective order. The judge may proceed with a final protective order hearing instead of a temporary protective order hearing if the respondent appears at the hearing, the respondent has been served with an interim protective order, or the court otherwise has personal jurisdiction over the respondent, and the petitioner and respondent expressly consent to waive the temporary protective order hearing. (See Family Law Article § 4-504.1 and 4-505.)

In a domestic violence proceeding, if a judge finds, by clear and convincing evidence, that abuse has occurred, or if the respondent consents to the entry of a protective order, the judge may grant a final protective order to protect any person eligible for relief from abuse. The maximum duration of a final protective order is generally one year. (See Family Law Article § 4-506.)

The following shows the types of orders that may be imposed, depending on whether the order is interim, temporary, or final.

Interim, Temporary, or Final Protective Order may order respondent to:

- refrain from abusing or threatening to abuse any person eligible for relief;
- refrain from contacting, attempting to contact, or harassing any person eligible for relief;
- refrain from entering the residence of any person eligible for relief;
- vacate the home immediately and, in certain cases, award temporary use and possession of the home to the person eligible for relief; or
- remain away from the place of employment, school, or temporary residence of a person eligible for relief or home of other family members.

Interim Protective Order may:

- if child abuse is alleged, award temporary custody of minor child of respondent and person eligible for relief;
- if a person eligible for relief and the respondent are residing together at the time of the alleged abuse, award temporary custody of any child of the person eligible for relief and respondent then residing in the home; or
- if vulnerable adult abuse is alleged, award temporary use and possession of home to other adult.

Temporary or Final Protective Order may:

- order respondent to remain away from child care provider of person eligible for relief while child is in provider's care;
- award temporary custody of a child of the person eligible for relief and the respondent.

Final Protective Order may:

- establish temporary visitation with child of respondent and person eligible for relief, under certain conditions;
- award emergency family maintenance to any person eligible for relief;
- award temporary use and possession of vehicle jointly owned by respondent and eligible person to eligible person;
- direct respondent or persons eligible for relief to take part in counseling or domestic violence program;
- order respondent to surrender any firearms for duration of final order; or
- order respondent to pay filing fees and proceeding costs.

A person who fails to comply with specified relief granted in an interim, temporary, or final protective order is guilty of a misdemeanor. A first offense subjects the violator to maximum penalties of imprisonment for 90 days and/or a \$1,000 fine. A second or subsequent offense subjects the violator to maximum penalties of imprisonment for one year and/or a \$2,500 fine. (*See Family Law Article § 4-509.*)

A person is prohibited from overdriving or overloading an animal, depriving an animal of necessary sustenance; inflicting unnecessary suffering or pain on an animal; or causing, procuring, or authorizing such an act. If a person has custody or charge of an animal, as an owner or otherwise, that person is prohibited from unnecessarily failing to provide

sufficient nutrition; necessary veterinary care; proper drink, air, space, shelter, or protection from the elements. A person who violates this provision is guilty of a misdemeanor and is subject to maximum penalties of 90 days imprisonment and/or a \$1,000 fine. As a condition of sentencing, the court may order a convicted defendant to participate in and pay for psychological counseling. (See Criminal Law Article § 10-604.)

A person may not intentionally mutilate, torture, cruelly beat, or kill an animal or cause or procure such an act. Except in the case of self-defense, a person may not intentionally inflict bodily harm, permanent disability, or death on an animal owned or used by a law enforcement unit. A person who violates these provisions is guilty of the felony of aggravated cruelty to animals and is subject to maximum penalties of three years imprisonment and/or a \$5,000 fine. As a condition of sentencing, the court may order a person convicted of this crime to participate in and pay for psychological counseling. (See Criminal Law Article § 10-606.)

Background: The following table shows judicial activity in fiscal 2007 with regard to protective orders (the latest available).

<u>Jurisdiction</u>	<u>Hearings</u>	<u>Interim Orders Granted</u>	<u>Temporary Orders Granted</u>	<u>Final Orders Granted</u>
Circuit Court	7,106	N/A	1,936	1,290
District Court	53,952	10,170	15,491	7,814

According to the State Police Uniform Crime Report issued for calendar 2007, 19,391 domestic violence crimes occurred in Maryland, a 12% decrease compared to the calendar 2006 total of 21,965. Assault was by far the most frequently reported crime, with 17,995 incidents in calendar 2007. Of reported assaults, simple assaults comprised 13,728 incidents. Aggravated assaults totaled 4,261 or 23.7% of the reported domestic violence assaults for the same period. In 2007, 30 homicides were attributed to domestic violence incidents. The number of offenses against family and children totaled 644 and incidents of malicious destruction of property totaled 112. The number of incidents involving pets is unknown.

More than 64 million households in the United States include a pet. According to the American Humane Association, 10 states (California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Nevada, New York, Tennessee, and Vermont) and the District of Columbia have enacted legislation that provides protection to pets that may be possessed by a domestic violence victim or a child of the victim. According to the Humane Society of the United States, up to 71% of battered women report the pet was threatened, harmed, or killed by their partners and up to 48% of women delay leaving a dangerous domestic situation because of a fear that their partners will harm or kill the family pet. Many

domestic violence shelters, including some in Maryland, now offer “safe havens” for pets of domestic violence victims.

State and Local Fiscal Effect: The Administrative Office of the Courts advises that forms issued in domestic violence cases require revision to reflect the new relief proposed in the bill. Legislative Services advises that the Judiciary can implement any required changes with existing resources.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: SB 615 of 2008 passed the Senate as amended and received a hearing in the House Judiciary Committee but no further action was taken. SB 965 and HB 1376 of 2007 received no action after being heard by the Senate Judicial Proceedings and House Judiciary committees, respectively.

Cross File: SB 736 (Senator Raskin, *et al.*) - Judicial Proceedings.

Information Source(s): Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts), Department of State Police, American Humane Association, Humane Society of the United States, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 18, 2009
mcp/kdm

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