



MARYLAND VOTES FOR ANIMALS

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January 15, 2021

To: House Environment & Transportation Committee
From: Lisa Radov, President and Chairman, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.
Re: Crimes – Unattended Dogs in Extreme Weather Conditions- HB 81 - SUPPORT

Chairman Barve, Vice Chairman Stein, members of the Environment & Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before to you today. My name is Lisa Radov. I am the President and Chairman of Maryland Votes for Animals. We champion humane legislation to improve the lives of animals in Maryland. Speaking for Maryland Votes for Animals, our Board of Directors, and our members across Maryland, I respectfully request that the Environment & Transportation Committee vote favorably for Crimes – Unattended Dogs in Extreme Weather Conditions – HB 81.

This bill will give law enforcement and the public clear and consistent minimum standards with respect to leaving dogs outside and unattended in extreme weather conditions. Extreme weather laws have recently passed in ten Maryland counties. There are fundamental similarities, as well as differences, in each of those laws. This bill is the result of feedback from animal control agencies across Maryland, including those that had and had not passed extreme weather laws, to find language that would work in counties as diverse as Garrett, Prince George's, Queen Anne's, Carroll, Montgomery, Baltimore County and Baltimore City. One of the key pieces of feedback was that it is impossible for some owners to bring their large, outdoor hunting dogs into their homes in extreme weather, an issue in Garrett County, but probably not Baltimore City. This bill works for the varied conditions in Maryland counties as it not only enumerates basic, commonsense standards to protect unattended dogs from suffering in extreme weather conditions, but also it allows for dogs to remain outdoors in these conditions provided that they have continuous access to suitable shelter, which is defined in the bill.

Animal control officers are usually called when it is too late and dogs are suffering seizures, heatstroke, hypothermia, and death after being outdoors for long periods of time in extreme weather conditions. This bill will reduce the suffering these animals endure, and the serious consequences, including death, caused by these conditions. It will provide a consistent standard across Maryland that does not change as a dog is moved between jurisdictions. Establishing guidelines about dogs left outdoors enables animal control officers to intervene before a dog shows symptoms of acute distress. Moreover, adding clarity to the law can foster both public awareness and compliance, which could potentially avert some of these life-threatening situations before they occur.

Last year, when there was a question about whether this bill could jeopardize or weaken requirements in local jurisdictions, Delegate Lehman not only got an opinion that local law would take precedence, but also she added language to the bill that states:

“THIS SECTION MAY NOT BE CONSTRUED TO PROHIBIT A LOCAL GOVERNMENT FROM ADOPTING A REQUIREMENT FOR THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF DOGS THAT IS MORE STRINGENT THAN THE REQUIREMENTS OF THIS SECTION.”

This committee gave a favorable report to last year's identical bill that passed in the House 125-7 before it ran out of time due to the early end of the session.

Let's make 2021 the year that we get these dogs suffering outside in extreme weather protection.

In closing, I would like to thank Delegate Lehman for her sponsorship of HB 81 and ask this committee for a favorable report.

Let Kindness Reign, Vote Humane

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January 11, 2021

