



Senate Bill 157

Domestic Animals – Penalties for Abandonment and Microchip Requirements for Dogs

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Judicial Proceedings Committee

Date: January 24, 2024

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 157. This bill requires dog owners, including county-run animal shelters and their many supported partners, to install microchips into all dogs before they are adopted. Additionally, it mandates that a veterinarian is required to execute the procedure, which is not consistent with current standards, as microchipping is not considered practicing veterinary medicine.

Counties appreciate the elements of the bill that are locally authorizing and seek to promote compliance with best practices for dog owners. However, this mandate on the many nonprofit organizations that work in partnership with counties could pose administrative and cost challenges. These organizations – including small non-profits and community programs – are indispensable when it comes to managing the vast number of animals local facilities can rescue. Provisions of the bill, such as the requirement to contract a veterinarian for every single microchip procedure, could represent a meaningful burden in operations that already commonly struggle with funding, staffing, and space. The loss of even one supporting agency would likely increase – significantly – the costs for the counties, who are already making a substantial effort with these practices, despite the absence of a mandate.

While counties appreciate some elements of the bill, we are more concerned with how its specific mandates could undermine and further challenge our partners in this important work. For this reason, MACo **urges the committee to give** SB 157 an **UNFAVORABLE** report.