



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

**February 15, 2024
Judiciary Committee**

HB 667

Criminal Law - Crimes Relating to Animals - Conviction and Sentencing

FAVORABLE

The Humane Society of the United States, on behalf of our members and supporters in Maryland, urges a favorable report on HB 667. This bill seeks to restore the ability to bring multiple felony charges in cases where multiple animals are seriously abused or neglected.

Animal related felony cases represent the worst animal crimes that occur – from dog fighting to sexual assault. Each felony charge represents an animal that has been intentionally, severely, and cruelly treated. Prosecutors have always had the ability to stack felony charges in these cases, but last May a decision by the Maryland Sentencing Commission took away that ability due to a technicality in the law.

Maryland is making a concerted effort to move away from felony convictions and to decrease incarceration. But animals, while legally property, are also living creatures; this puts them in a grey area between physical possessions, for which felony charges can no longer be stacked, and people, where felony charges can still be stacked. The HSUS understands the progress made by this committee and has not supported efforts to increase penalties for misdemeanor animal crimes. But we do feel strongly that in the most horrific cases – cases of violence against living creatures – animals should be treated differently than a television or a car.

We are happy to work with this committee to ensure that the goal of this legislation, ensuring that there is accountability for the worst animal crimes, does not undermine the work done by this committee to reduce incarceration overall. We also understand the bill may need some technical amendments and are working speedily with the sponsor to ensure that the final language is ready for passage this session.

We urge a favorable report on HB 667 to ensure that every life lost has its day in court.