

February 18, 2026
Testimony in Support of House Bill 564

Good afternoon, Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the House of Delegates.

My name is Nikki Pickens, and I am here today on behalf of myself and many other Maryland families whose trust was deeply violated.

On February 7, 2025, my beloved cat, Norby, passed away. Like the rest of my pets who have crossed the rainbow bridge, my family chose cremation so he could come home to us with dignity. That never happened.

Instead of cremains, families were given bags containing sand, cement, fertilizer, and crushed seashells. At least 38 deceased pets were discovered abandoned, left in the back of a hearse several on the side of the road. Many more have never been recovered or returned and remain missing to this day.

I created a Facebook support group so 80'+ victims would have a safe place to grieve, to vent, and to feel less alone. Losing a pet is already heartbreaking. Being forced to live with the uncertainty of not knowing what happened to their helpless bodies after trusting someone with their care is devastating beyond words.

Our pets are not “just animals.” They are family. They provide unconditional love, emotional comfort, and for some people, they are their only source of companionship. Treating them as mere property minimizes the deep bond we share and the harm caused when that bond is violated.

House Bill 564 is necessary to ensure accountability, transparency, and dignity in pet aftercare. No family should ever endure this kind of betrayal again.

I urge you to support House Bill 564—for our pets, for our families, and for the respect they deserve.

Thank you for your time.