

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2001 Session

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 91 (Delegate Owings) (By Request)
Environmental Matters

Disease Prevention - Rabies - Domestic Skunks

This bill adds domestic skunks to the list of domesticated animals (cats, dogs, and ferrets) that are not considered to be dangerous to human health and safety, and places the same rabies vaccination and quarantine requirements on them as currently exist on cats, dogs, and ferrets.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. This bill would not directly affect governmental operations or finances.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Potential minimal.

Analysis

Current Law: The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) may prohibit the importation, selling, trading, purchasing, bartering, breeding, raising, keeping, or possession of any animals found to be dangerous to human health and safety. Domestic cats, dogs, and ferrets are not considered to be dangerous to human health and safety. These animals are required to be vaccinated against rabies, and the owners of these animals must submit proof of such vaccination in order to license or register the animal with any county. Licensed veterinarians who vaccinate these animals are required to issue a vaccination certificate to the animal's owner, and keep a record of the vaccination for a period of five years. If a dog, cat, or ferret bites a human, the animal must be

quarantined in a manner designated by the local health official, and may be destroyed under certain circumstances.

Maryland law, Chapter 491 of 1980, specifically forbids the importation, sale, trade, barter, or exchange of any live skunk as a household pet.

Background: Domesticating wild skunks is illegal in the United States because they can be carriers of rabies. No vaccine is available to inoculate skunks against rabies, nor is there an approved quarantine period. The only way to test a skunk for rabies is to kill it and test its brain tissue. Approximately one-third of the states do, however, allow skunks as pets, usually subject to licensure and other regulations. In these states pet skunks must be purchased from USDA-approved breeding farms that raise baby skunks in a quarantined environment to protect them from exposure to rabies. Regionally, Pennsylvania and West Virginia allow skunks as pets, while Delaware and Virginia do not. The 1980 Maryland law banning skunks from being sold, bartered, or traded as household pets was passed after reports in 1977 declared that a rabid skunk exposed ten persons to rabies.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; Skunk Lover Raises a Stink Over Ownership Ban, *Washington Times*, November 13, 2000; Do Pet Skunks Make Scents?, *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 6, 1999; Department of Legislative Services

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