

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2007 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 1376

(Delegate McComas, *et al.*)

Judiciary

Domestic Violence - Cruelty Toward an Abused Spouse's Pet

This bill authorizes a court, when issuing an interim, temporary, or final protective order, to order the respondent to remain away from the pet of the person eligible for relief or of a family member. The court may also order the respondent to refrain from cruelty or aggravated cruelty towards the pet. The definition of “stalking” is expanded to include a malicious course of conduct that includes approaching or pursuing another person where the pursuer intends to place or knows or should have known that the conduct would place the pursued person in reasonable fear that a pet of the person being pursued or a pet of a third person likely will suffer cruelty or aggravated cruelty.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill’s changes could be implemented and enforced with existing resources.

Local Effect: The bill’s changes could be implemented and enforced with existing resources.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: A petition for an interim protective order may be filed with a District Court commissioner if the clerk of the circuit court or clerk of the District Court is not open for business. If the commissioner finds there are reasonable grounds to believe that the respondent has abused a person eligible for relief, the commissioner may issue an

interim protective order. If, after a hearing on a petition, whether *ex parte* or otherwise, a judge finds that there are reasonable grounds to believe a person eligible for relief has been abused, the judge may issue a temporary protective order. The judge may proceed with a final protective order hearing instead of a temporary protective order hearing if the respondent appears at the hearing, the respondent has been served with an interim protective order, or the court otherwise has personal jurisdiction over the respondent, and the petitioner and respondent expressly consent to waive the temporary protective order hearing.

In a domestic violence proceeding, if a judge finds, by clear and convincing evidence, that abuse has occurred, or if the respondent consents to the entry of a protective order, the judge may grant a final protective order to protect any person eligible for relief from abuse. The maximum duration of a final protective order is one year.

The following shows the types of orders that may be imposed, depending on whether the order is interim, temporary, or final.

Interim, Temporary, or Final Protective Order May order respondent to:

- refrain from abusing or threatening to abuse any person eligible for relief.
- refrain from contacting, attempting to contact, or harassing any person eligible for relief.
- refrain from entering the residence of any person eligible for relief.
- in certain cases, vacate the home immediately and award temporary use and possession of the home to the person eligible for relief.
- remain away from the place of employment, school, or temporary residence of a person eligible for relief or home of other family members.

Interim Protective Order May:

- if child abuse alleged, award temporary custody of minor child of respondent and person eligible for relief.
- if vulnerable adult abuse alleged, award temporary use and possession of home to other adult.
- order respondent to remain away from residence of any family member of person eligible for relief.

Temporary or Final Protective Order May:

- order respondent to remain away from child care provider of person eligible for relief while child is in provider's care.
- award temporary custody of child of person eligible for relief and respondent.

Final Protective Order May:

- establish temporary visitation with child of respondent and person eligible for relief, under certain conditions.
- award emergency family maintenance to any person eligible for relief.
- award temporary use and possession of vehicle jointly owned by respondent and eligible person to eligible person.
- direct respondent or persons eligible for relief to take part in counseling or domestic violence program.
- order respondent to surrender any firearms for duration of final order.
- order respondent to pay filing fees and proceeding costs.

“Stalking” means a malicious course of conduct that includes approaching or pursuing another where the pursuer intends to place or knows or reasonably should have known that the conduct would place another in reasonable fear of serious bodily injury, of assault in any degree, of rape or sexual offense or attempted rape or sexual offense in any degree, of false imprisonment, death, or that a third person is likely to suffer any of these acts.

The stalking provisions do not apply to conduct that is performed to ensure compliance with a court order, conduct to carry out a specific lawful commercial purpose, or is authorized, required, or protected by law. A person who violates the stalking provisions is guilty of a misdemeanor and is subject to maximum penalties of five years imprisonment and/or a \$5,000 fine. A sentence for stalking may be imposed separate from and consecutive to, or concurrent with, a sentence for any other crime based on the underlying conduct.

A “pet” is a domesticated animal and does not include livestock.

Background: The following table shows judicial activity in fiscal 2006 with regard to protective orders (the latest available).

<u>Jurisdiction</u>	<u>Hearings</u>	<u>Interim Orders Granted</u>	<u>Temporary Orders Granted</u>	<u>Final Orders Granted</u>
Circuit Court	7,299	N/A	2,083	1,380
District Court	52,042	9,429	14,867	7,654

According to the State Police *Crime Report* issued for calendar 2005, 22,092 domestic violence crimes occurred in Maryland, a 4% reduction compared to the calendar 2004 total of 23,013. Assault was by far the most frequently reported crime, with 20,482 instances in calendar 2005. Of reported assaults, simple assault comprised 15,798 incidents and stalking comprised 16 incidents. Aggravated assaults totaled 4,668, or 23% of the reported domestic violence assaults for the same period. The number of incidents reported against families and children were 591 and incidents of malicious destruction of property totaled 179 in calendar 2005. The number of incidents involving pets is unknown.

According to the Maryland State Bar Association, two states, Maine and Vermont, have enacted legislation that provides protection to pets that may be possessed by a domestic violence victim or a child of the victim. The Maryland State Bar Association's Section on Animal Law has found that domestic violence victims will return to an abuser if the victim believes that an abuser could harm a child or animal in the abuser's custody in an attempt to intimidate the victim.

State and Local Fiscal Effect: The Administrative Office of the Courts advises that forms issued in domestic violence cases would have to be changed to reflect the new type of order proposed in the bill. Legislative Services advises that the Judiciary should be able to implement any required changes with existing resources.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: SB 965 (Senator Raskin, *et al.*) - Judicial Proceedings.

Information Source(s): Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts), Maryland State Police, Maryland State Bar Association, Department of Legislative Services

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