

Chapter 402

(House Bill 563)

AN ACT concerning

Criminal Law – Emergency Response Animal – Prohibited Actions Against

FOR the purpose of repealing the prohibition against intentionally inflicting bodily harm, permanent disability, or death on an animal owned or used by a law enforcement unit; prohibiting a person from harassing, interfering with, injuring, or killing or causing serious physical injury to an emergency response animal; and generally relating to law enforcement animals.

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
 Article – Criminal Law
 Section 10–606
 Annotated Code of Maryland
 (2021 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

BY adding to
 Article – Criminal Law
 Section 10–606.1
 Annotated Code of Maryland
 (2021 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

~~BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,
 Article – Criminal Procedure
 Section 10–101(a) and (g)
 Annotated Code of Maryland
 (2025 Replacement Volume)~~

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Article – Criminal Law

10–606.

- (a) (1) In this section, “sexual contact with an animal” means any act:
- (i) involving:
1. a person touching the sex organ or anus of an animal;
 2. contact between:

A. the sex organ or anus of a person and the mouth, sex organ, or anus of an animal; or

B. the sex organ or anus of an animal, and the mouth, sex organ, or anus of a person; or

3. insertion of:

A. any part of the body of a person into the opening of the vagina or anus of an animal;

B. any part of an animal's body into the opening of the vagina or anus of a person; or

C. any object into the opening of the vagina or anus of an animal; and

(ii) committed for the purpose of sexual arousal, sexual gratification, abuse, or financial gain.

(2) "Sexual contact with an animal" does not include:

(i) an accepted veterinary practice;

(ii) artificial insemination of an animal for reproductive purposes;

(iii) accepted animal husbandry practices, including:

1. grooming;

2. raising;

3. breeding;

4. assisting with the birthing process; or

5. any other activity that provides care for an animal; or

(iv) generally accepted practices relating to the judging of breed confirmation.

(b) A person may not:

(1) intentionally:

(i) mutilate an animal;

- (ii) torture an animal;
- (iii) cruelly beat an animal;
- (iv) cruelly kill an animal; or
- (v) engage in sexual contact with an animal; **OR**

(2) cause, procure, or authorize an act prohibited under item (1) of this subsection]; or

(3) except in the case of self–defense, intentionally inflict bodily harm, permanent disability, or death on an animal owned or used by a law enforcement unit].

(c) (1) A person who violates this section is guilty of the felony of aggravated cruelty to animals and on conviction is subject to imprisonment not exceeding 3 years or a fine not exceeding \$5,000 or both.

(2) As a condition of sentencing, the court may:

(i) order a defendant convicted of violating this section to:

1. participate in and pay for psychological counseling; and
2. pay, in addition to any other fines and costs, all reasonable costs incurred in removing, housing, treating, or euthanizing an animal confiscated from the defendant; and

(ii) prohibit a defendant from owning, possessing, or residing with an animal for a specified period of time.

10–606.1.

(A) (1) IN THIS SECTION THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS INDICATED.

(2) “EMERGENCY RESPONSE ANIMAL” MEANS:

(1) A DOG USED BY A LAW ENFORCEMENT UNIT IN THE STATE THAT IS TRAINED FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT WORK AND IS SUBJECT TO THE CONTROL OF A LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER WHO HAS COMPLETED HANDLER TRAINING IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE POLICIES OF THE LAW ENFORCEMENT UNIT THAT EMPLOYS THE OFFICER;

(II) A HORSE USED BY A LAW ENFORCEMENT UNIT IN THE STATE FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT WORK; ~~OR OR~~

(III) A SEARCH AND RESCUE DOG TRAINED FOR OR ENGAGED IN AN EFFORT DIRECTED BY A STATE AGENCY OR A POLITICAL SUBDIVISION OF THE STATE TO LOCATE OR RESCUE A LOST, INJURED, OR DECEASED INDIVIDUAL; OR

(IV) A HORSE USED IN A SEARCH AND RESCUE EFFORT DIRECTED BY A STATE AGENCY OR A POLITICAL SUBDIVISION OF THE STATE TO LOCATE OR RESCUE A LOST, INJURED, OR DECEASED INDIVIDUAL.

(3) "LAW ENFORCEMENT UNIT" HAS THE MEANING STATED IN § 10-101 OF THE CRIMINAL PROCEDURE ARTICLE; ~~OR~~

~~(IV) A HORSE USED IN A SEARCH AND RESCUE EFFORT DIRECTED BY A STATE AGENCY OR A POLITICAL SUBDIVISION OF THE STATE TO LOCATE OR RESCUE A LOST, INJURED, OR DECEASED INDIVIDUAL.~~

~~(3) "LAW ENFORCEMENT UNIT" HAS THE MEANING STATED IN § 10-101 OF THE CRIMINAL PROCEDURE ARTICLE.~~

~~(3)~~ (4) "SERIOUS PHYSICAL INJURY" MEANS PHYSICAL INJURY THAT CAUSES PERMANENT OR PROTRACTED:

(I) DISFIGUREMENT;

(II) LOSS OF THE FUNCTION OF ANY BODILY MEMBER OR ORGAN; OR

(III) IMPAIRMENT OF THE FUNCTION OF ANY BODILY MEMBER OR ORGAN.

(B) ~~(1)~~ (1) ~~A EXCEPT IN THE CASE OF SELF-DEFENSE, A~~ A PERSON MAY NOT;

~~(1)~~ INTENTIONALLY HARASS OR INTERFERE WITH AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE ANIMAL DURING THE LAWFUL PERFORMANCE OF THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE ANIMAL'S DUTIES;

(2) ~~A PERSON MAY NOT~~ A PERSON MAY NOT INTENTIONALLY INJURE AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE ANIMAL.

~~(3) A PERSON MAY NOT ~~A PERSON MAY NOT~~ VIOLATE PARAGRAPH ~~ITEM PARAGRAPH~~ (1) OR (2) OF THIS SUBSECTION DURING THE COMMISSION OF A CRIME; ~~OR.~~~~

~~(4) A PERSON MAY NOT ~~A PERSON MAY NOT~~ INTENTIONALLY KILL OR CAUSE SERIOUS PHYSICAL INJURY TO AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE ANIMAL.~~

(c) (1) A PERSON WHO VIOLATES SUBSECTION (B)(1) OR (2) OF THIS SECTION IS GUILTY OF A MISDEMEANOR AND ON CONVICTION IS SUBJECT TO IMPRISONMENT NOT EXCEEDING 1 YEAR OR A FINE NOT EXCEEDING \$5,000 OR BOTH.

(2) A PERSON WHO VIOLATES SUBSECTION (B)(3) OR (4) OF THIS SECTION IS GUILTY OF A MISDEMEANOR AND ON CONVICTION IS SUBJECT TO IMPRISONMENT NOT EXCEEDING 2 YEARS OR A FINE NOT EXCEEDING ~~\$15,000~~ \$10,000 OR BOTH.

~~(3) A PERSON WHO VIOLATES SUBSECTION (B)(4) OF THIS SECTION IS GUILTY OF A MISDEMEANOR AND ON CONVICTION IS SUBJECT TO IMPRISONMENT NOT EXCEEDING 5 YEARS OR A FINE NOT EXCEEDING \$10,000 OR BOTH.~~

~~(D) A SENTENCE IMPOSED UNDER THIS SECTION MAY BE IMPOSED SEPARATE FROM AND CONSECUTIVE TO OR CONCURRENT WITH A SENTENCE FOR ANY CRIME BASED ON THE ACT ESTABLISHING THE VIOLATION OF THIS SECTION.~~

~~(E) (D) (1) NOTHING IN THIS SECTION PROHIBITS A DEFENDANT FROM ASSERTING THE DEFENSE OF NECESSITY OR SELF-DEFENSE TO A CHARGE OF VIOLATING THIS SECTION.~~

(2) IT IS AN AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE TO A CHARGE OF VIOLATING THIS SECTION THAT THE DEFENDANT ACTED REASONABLY TO PREVENT PHYSICAL HARM RESULTING FROM A VIOLATION OF THE MARYLAND USE OF FORCE STATUTE UNDER § 3-524 OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY ARTICLE.

~~Article—Criminal Procedure~~

~~10-101.~~

~~(a) In this subtitle the following words have the meanings indicated.~~

~~(g) “Law enforcement unit” means a State, county, or municipal police department or unit, the office of a sheriff, the office of a State’s Attorney, the Office of the State Prosecutor, or the Office of the Attorney General of the State.~~

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect October 1, 2026.

Approved by the Governor, May 12, 2026.