

HOUSE BILL 912

L6, E1, M4

6lr1948
CF 6lr2129

By: **Delegates Guyton, Palakovich Carr, Ruth, and Terrasa**

Introduced and read first time: February 5, 2026

Assigned to: Environment and Transportation

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Local Government – Trap–Neuter–Return Policies for Community Cats –**
3 **Requirements and Restrictions**
4 **(Ash’s Law)**

5 FOR the purpose of establishing that a certain prohibition against abandoning an animal
6 does not apply to a person who is providing care to a community cat under a certain
7 trap–neuter–return policy; establishing that a local law that establishes a
8 trap–neuter–return policy is subject to certain requirements and restrictions; and
9 generally relating to trap–neuter–return policies for community cats.

10 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
11 Article – Criminal Law
12 Section 10–612
13 Annotated Code of Maryland
14 (2021 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

15 BY adding to
16 Article – Local Government
17 Section 1–1321
18 Annotated Code of Maryland
19 (2013 Volume and 2025 Supplement)

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

22 **Article – Criminal Law**

23 10–612.

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



(a) **THIS SECTION DOES NOT APPLY TO A PERSON WHO IS PROVIDING CARE TO A COMMUNITY CAT UNDER A TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN POLICY IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 1-1321 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ARTICLE.**

(B) A person who owns, possesses, or has custody of a domestic animal may not drop or leave the animal on a road, in a public place, or on private property with the intent to abandon the animal.

[(b)] (C) A person who violates this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to a fine not exceeding \$100.

Article – Local Government

1-1321.

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

(2) (I) **“COMMUNITY CAT” MEANS A FREE-ROAMING CAT THAT MAY BE CARED FOR BY ONE OR MORE RESIDENTS OF THE IMMEDIATE AREA WITHIN WHICH THE CAT IS LOCATED.**

(II) **“COMMUNITY CAT” INCLUDES A FERAL CAT.**

(3) (I) **“COMMUNITY CAT CAREGIVER” MEANS A PERSON WHO PROVIDES CARE TO A COMMUNITY CAT, INCLUDING FOOD, SHELTER, OR MEDICAL CARE, UNDER A TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN POLICY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THIS SECTION.**

(II) **“COMMUNITY CAT CAREGIVER” DOES NOT INCLUDE A PERSON WHO IS CONSIDERED THE OWNER, HARBORER, CONTROLLER, OR KEEPER OF A COMMUNITY CAT.**

(4) **“EARTIP” MEANS A PROCEDURE THAT:**

(I) **REMOVES THE DISTAL ONE-QUARTER OF THE LEFT EAR OF A COMMUNITY CAT;**

(II) **IS PERFORMED USING ANESTHESIA UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF A LICENSED VETERINARIAN; AND**

(III) **IS DESIGNED TO IDENTIFY A COMMUNITY CAT AS BEING STERILIZED AND VACCINATED FOR RABIES.**

1 **(5) (I) “TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN” MEANS TO HUMANELY TRAP,**
2 **STERILIZE, VACCINATE FOR RABIES, EARTIP, AND RETURN A COMMUNITY CAT TO**
3 **THE LOCATION WHERE THE CAT WAS ORIGINALLY TRAPPED.**

4 **(II) “TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN” INCLUDES PROVIDING CARE TO**
5 **A COMMUNITY CAT.**

6 **(B) THIS SECTION APPLIES TO ALL COUNTIES AND MUNICIPALITIES.**

7 **(C) A LOCAL LAW THAT ESTABLISHES A TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN POLICY:**

8 **(1) MAY NOT REQUIRE ANY REGISTRATION OR CERTIFICATION**
9 **PROCESS FOR A COMMUNITY CAT CAREGIVER;**

10 **(2) SHALL AUTHORIZE THE TRAPPING OF A COMMUNITY CAT TO**
11 **STERILIZE, VACCINATE FOR RABIES, AND EARTIP THE COMMUNITY CAT IN**
12 **ACCORDANCE WITH FEDERAL OR STATE LAW;**

13 **(3) SHALL AUTHORIZE A COMMUNITY CAT CAREGIVER TO RECLAIM**
14 **AN IMPOUNDED COMMUNITY CAT WITHOUT PROOF OF OWNERSHIP FOR THE**
15 **PURPOSE OF:**

16 **(I) CARRYING OUT A TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN POLICY; OR**

17 **(II) RETURNING AN EARTIPPED CAT TO THE LOCATION WHERE**
18 **THE CAT WAS ORIGINALLY TRAPPED;**

19 **(4) UNLESS VETERINARY CARE IS REQUIRED, SHALL REQUIRE THAT:**

20 **(I) AN EARTIPPED CAT THAT IS RECEIVED BY A LOCAL SHELTER**
21 **BE RETURNED TO THE LOCATION WHERE THE CAT WAS ORIGINALLY TRAPPED; AND**

22 **(II) AN EARTIPPED CAT THAT IS TRAPPED BE RETURNED**
23 **ON-SITE; AND**

24 **(5) SHALL ESTABLISH TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN AS THE PREFERRED**
25 **DISPOSITION OF AN IMPOUNDED COMMUNITY CAT.**

26 **(D) THIS SECTION SUPERSEDES AND PREEMPTS ANY LAW, ORDINANCE,**
27 **POLICY, OR REGULATION OF ANY LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODY, AND ANY POLICY OR**
28 **RULE OF ANY PERSON OR CORPORATION, THAT PROHIBITS OR RESTRICTS THE**
29 **PRACTICE OF TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN.**

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