

# HOUSE BILL 912

L6, E1, M4

6lr1948  
CF SB 750

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By: **Delegates Guyton, Palakovich Carr, Ruth ~~and Terrasa~~, Terrasa, Healey,  
Lewis, and Ziegler**

Introduced and read first time: February 5, 2026

Assigned to: Environment and Transportation

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Committee Report: Favorable with amendments

House action: Adopted

Read second time: March 9, 2026

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## CHAPTER \_\_\_\_\_

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~~ certain  
6 provisions of law prohibiting the abandonment or certain neglect of an animal ~~does~~  
7 do not apply to a person who is providing care to a community cat under a certain  
8 trap–neuter–return policy; establishing that a local law that establishes a  
9 trap–neuter–return policy is subject to certain requirements and restrictions; and  
10 generally relating to trap–neuter–return policies for community cats.

11 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,  
12 Article – Criminal Law  
13 Section 10–604 and 10–612  
14 Annotated Code of Maryland  
15 (2021 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

16 BY adding to  
17 Article – Local Government  
18 Section 1–1321  
19 Annotated Code of Maryland  
20 (2013 Volume and 2025 Supplement)

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EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

Underlining indicates amendments to bill.

~~Strike out~~ indicates matter stricken from the bill by amendment or deleted from the law by amendment.



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

**Article – Criminal Law**

10–604.

(a) [A] SUBJECT TO SUBSECTION (B) OF THIS SECTION, A person may not:

(1) overdrive or overload an animal;

(2) deprive an animal of necessary sustenance;

(3) inflict unnecessary suffering or pain on an animal;

(4) cause, procure, or authorize an act prohibited under item (1), (2), or (3) of this subsection; or

(5) if the person has charge or custody of an animal, as owner or otherwise, unnecessarily fail to provide the animal with:

(i) nutritious food in sufficient quantity;

(ii) necessary veterinary care;

(iii) proper drink;

(iv) proper air;

(v) proper space;

(vi) proper shelter; or

(vii) proper protection from the weather.

(b) A PERSON WHO PROVIDES CARE TO A COMMUNITY CAT UNDER A TRAP–NEUTER–RETURN POLICY IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 1–1321 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ARTICLE MAY NOT BE DEEMED AS HAVING CHARGE OR CUSTODY OF THE COMMUNITY CAT UNDER SUBSECTION (A)(5) OF THIS SECTION.

(c) (1) A person who violates this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to imprisonment not exceeding 90 days or a fine not exceeding \$1,000 or both.

(2) As a condition of sentencing, the court may order a defendant convicted of violating this section to:



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

20                   **(3) SHALL AUTHORIZE A COMMUNITY CAT CAREGIVER TO RECLAIM**  
21 **AN IMPOUNDED COMMUNITY CAT WITHOUT PROOF OF OWNERSHIP FOR THE**  
22 **PURPOSE OF:**

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

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

26                   **(4) UNLESS VETERINARY CARE IS REQUIRED OR A LOCATION IS**  
27 **DEEMED UNSAFE FOR RETURN OF AN EARTIPPED CAT, SHALL REQUIRE THAT:**

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

1                   (II) AN EARTIPPED CAT THAT IS TRAPPED BE RETURNED  
2 ON-SITE; AND

3                   (5) SHALL ESTABLISH TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN AS THE PREFERRED  
4 DISPOSITION OF AN IMPOUNDED COMMUNITY CAT.

5                   (D) THIS SECTION SUPERSEDES AND PREEMPTS ANY LAW, ORDINANCE,  
6 POLICY, OR REGULATION OF ANY LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODY, AND ANY POLICY OR  
7 RULE OF ANY PERSON OR CORPORATION, THAT PROHIBITS OR RESTRICTS THE  
8 PRACTICE OF TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN.

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

Approved:

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Governor.

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Speaker of the House of Delegates.

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President of the Senate.