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**HB712: Labor and Employment – Leave with Pay – Bereavement Leave
(Family Bereavement Act)**

Economic Matters Committee SUPPORT FOR HB712

To Delegate Dereck E. Davis, Economic Matters Chair, Vice Chair and Committee Members:

My personal story which prompted the idea for this bill began after my beloved dog, Lucy, died in June of 2018. For ten and a half years, we were inseparable. While I knew I would be sad when the time came I could never have imagined the profound grief that followed. This grief was greater than any I have ever experienced despite having buried close friends and both of my parents over the years. I could not eat, I could not sleep, I could barely function at work. I honestly felt like I could just die. I was suffering profound grief. I had a funeral and burial service for Lucy which was attended by over 100 people. This memorial aided me in processing my grief. The most significant thing that helped me turn the corner was attending a Pet Loss Support Group at the Humane Society in Reisterstown. I was in a room with people, young and old, male and female, of varying ethnicities who were just as sad as I was! It was then I learned I was not alone in my grief. Up until then, I thought I was going crazy, even to the point of seeing a counsellor, but being with this group and sharing this bond of grief, helped greatly through my grief process.

As a registered nurse, I took an advanced course to become a Pet Loss Grief Recovery Specialist and went on to start the first pet loss support group in Baltimore City called LOU, Lifting Other Up. This support group is a safe place where people, many of whom are employed in the state of Maryland, share their stories and grief journey in a world where there are many, including employers, who just do not understand or support a grieving employee because their dog or cat is sick or just died. This is where the idea to find employer support for bereavement following the loss of pet began. I am here to speak for the employees who I have listened to at my pet loss support groups who have shared they have *added* stress because their employer 'doesn't get it' that their dog or cat is ill or died. It would please me to know that the state of Maryland gets it.

I first reached out to Senator Washington's office who took my query seriously and I thank her for that. After Senator Washington's team researched the subject, I was surprised to learn that Maryland does not have a bereavement leave law at all!

My personal research found that only one other state has a bereavement leave law and that one does not include the mourning of pets. I am here today to ask the state of Maryland to show compassion to employees who need to take time off to manage their bereavement and affairs after the loss of a loved one. Additionally, the research presented to you today substantiates the fact that there is *no difference in the grief that can follow* the loss of a pet or the loss of a human.

It is widely known that a majority of pet owners regard their pets as family. In 2016, our own Governor Hogan grieved the death of his dog, Lexi, and is quoted in a Sun Papers article as saying: "For 16 years our dog Lexi has been a much loved member of our family".

I enclose a poignant YouTube clip to emphasize the profound effect that can follow the death of a pet:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTMxTytvU3Q>



[Losing a dog is like losing a family member](#)

Why does losing a dog feel like losing a family member? The way we attach to dogs is similar to the way we attach to humans. The challenge is to mourn the loss of a dog the same way we mourn the loss of a human. I try to do that here by remembering Mwaji. Special thanks to Elizabeth S., Tyler D., Anna H., Arnt J., Collin P., Evan A., Imran M ...

www.youtube.com

I ask for a FAVORABLE REPORT on HB712.

Respectfully,

Karen Ann Klima