



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
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February 26, 2020

Environment and Transportation Committee  
Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen St Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for HB 406

Dear Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and members of the committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 406 that will protect dogs from extreme weather on behalf of the Humane Society of the United States and our members and supporters in Maryland. I have been working in the field of animal welfare and advocacy for five years and have had the opportunity to assist enforcement officers across our state with many cruelty cases. Cases of dogs left outside in dangerous weather are one of the most reported types of animal cruelty, but vagueness of current law makes it difficult for enforcement officers to act before a dog has suffered injury or death due to exposure.

HB 406 is very commonsense legislation, simply requiring that dogs are provided proper shelter when temperatures are below 32 or above 90 degrees, or if there is a severe weather warning issued by the National Weather Service. January 2019's brutally cold winter highlighted the need for HB 406, as temperatures plummeted with documented actual temperatures below 0 degrees Fahrenheit, and winter weather warnings were issued throughout the state. Maryland's law offers no protections for dogs left outdoors in these cases of severe weather. Extended exposure to brutally cold temperatures can result in frostbite and potentially deadly hypothermia. In summer months, heat stroke is a common cause of death for dogs.

It is a common misconception that dogs' fur enables them to withstand extreme cold better than humans. In fact, dogs of any breed who are exposed to extreme cold for long periods of time can and do suffer from hypothermia or death. Exposed skin like the nose, ears, and paw pads are highly susceptible to frost bite and can be permanently damaged. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) recommends that dogs, even thick-coated artic breeds, should not be left outside during below freezing weather – and especially not without shelter that allows the dog to maintain normal body temperature.

Dogs across Maryland are suffering and, in some cases, dying from exposure to extreme cold and heat. A definition of shelter that establishes minimum standards is essential. HB 406 will serve as an educational tool to inform pet owners of the level of care they must provide and will make law enforcement less burdensome by providing criteria for determining when the law has been violated. Like any good law, HB 406 is clear and enforceable, designed to solve a problem at hand, and reasonable for citizens to comply. It will protect dogs who live outdoors without creating an undue hardship for owners, and we look forward to its passage.

Sincerely,

Emily Hovermale  
Maryland and Delaware State Director