

Hello, and thank you for the opportunity to speak about SB 627.

My name is Deborah Stone Hess. I chair the Baltimore County Animal Services Advisory Commission. Our Commission was created by the Baltimore County Council to advise on matters concerning Baltimore County Animal Services, which is made up of our county-run shelter and Animal Control Division.

In 2018, our County Council passed a bill very similar to SB 627. It's known as Oscar's Law, and was created after the death of a dog named Oscar.

Oscar's story is tragic. For years, he was often left outside in a yard without shelter from the elements. Citizens concerned for his welfare in bad weather called Animal Services repeatedly.

On December 30, 2017, someone called again after a picture of Oscar lying lifeless in the snow was posted on Facebook. That photo is included with my written testimony.

Oscar died later that day of hypothermia. His owner entered an Alford plea to a charge of animal cruelty.

Members of our Commission were deeply disturbed. One of our Commission members, Joy Freedman, and two other animal advocates, Darla Feeheley, and Julianne Zimmer worked with

County Councilmen David Marks and Tom Quirk to draft Oscar's Law which ultimately passed unanimously.

Its aim...to ensure that no animal in Baltimore County would be left without shelter in extreme weather...temperatures below 32 degrees or above 90, in wind, rain, snow, ice, sleet, hail, or exposure to direct sunlight or hot pavement.

This does not prevent someone from allowing dogs in their yard. They simply must take common sense steps to ensure the dog has available shelter in the yard in case of harsh weather.

While animals are considered property under the law, they are living feeling beings. They suffer in extreme weather.

Oscar's Law aims to prevent such suffering in Baltimore County. I urge you to afford this protection to animals throughout the state by passing SB 627.

Thank you.