



AMERICAN
KENNEL CLUB®

January 14, 2021

RE: AKC Seeks Amend to HB 81 to Avoid Unintended Harmful Consequences for Dogs

Dear Chair Barve and Members of Maryland House Environment and Transportation Committee:

As the recognized experts in canine breeding, health, care, and sports, the American Kennel Club (AKC) promotes responsible dog ownership, which includes proper care necessary to keep dogs healthy and safe. We share the public's concerns about the well-being of all pets and agree that no animal should ever be left in a situation where its health and safety are in jeopardy or basic needs are not met.

The AKC agrees with the goals of House Bill 81 and are grateful and appreciative that it will protect some dogs in the state of Maryland. As such, the American Kennel Club (AKC) writes on behalf our 78 affiliated kennel clubs, Responsible Dog Owners of Maryland (RDO-MD) and the thousands of responsible dog owners and sportsmen in Maryland to express our appreciation for exemptions already included, and request two slight clarifications to ensure all dogs are protected.

We greatly appreciate the opportunity we have had to work with Delegate Lehman and express our concerns with the legislation. Even more so, we are most appreciative that the exemptions for dogs lawfully and activity engaged in hunting; livestock herding; sledding; sporting; or training, which oftentimes occurs in temperatures outside those established by the bill, were added as an amendment to last session's predecessor legislation (HB 406 of 2020) and are included in House Bill 81. The AKC shares Del. Lehman's concern about the well-being of all dogs. It is for this reason we are asking for amendments to ensure that all dogs are truly protected.

By using absolute temperature standards to protect dogs from inclement weather, the legislation does not take into consideration other important factors such as the age, breed, general health and condition of the dog or its ability to withstand the environment. While some dogs can thrive in temperatures outside the proposed absolute limits for extended periods of time, some dogs simply cannot handle the temperatures permitted in this bill for even 30 minutes – potentially putting those dogs in danger. In addition, even responsible owners would be given the false sense that their dog is safe because forecasted weather is not predicated to reach or be near the established absolute temperature. Please see this [information sheet](#) for factors to consider when addressing the issue of dogs in inclement weather.

AKC Requests Two Clarifications:

Our first recommendation would be to replace the temperatures with language that would not allow dogs outdoors *“during any period in which a hazardous weather advisory or warning has been issued by the National Weather Service for the local area, no dog shall be left in conditions where the health and safety of the dog is at risk.”* However, we respect the sponsor's desire to keep the temperatures in this bill. As such, **AKC recommends that language be added that considers the age, breed, general health and condition of the dog and its ability to withstand the environment.** This would keep the absolute temperature language but would also allow for the needs of various breeds, ages, and the general health of individual dogs to be considered and protected.

Additionally, AKC recommends that “acclimation” be added to the list of exemptions. While we are pleased that the existing exemptions are included, many sportsmen and other trainers have noted that any time that a trained dog may be called upon to perform a specific task in potential adverse conditions (for example search and rescue), the dog must first be acclimated to those conditions. This avoids any potential harm that might result from performing the task without proper preparation.

While we understand the intent of this legislation is aimed at backyards or property that provide no shelter for dogs from extreme weather, we also recognize that any legislation offered must also consider the unintended consequences that could result if the legislation becomes law. Without an exemption for acclimation, an owner, trainer, or handler may not be able to appropriately acclimate a dog in the field or any location without suitable shelter. This is essential as there may be situations when other tasks necessary to prepare for the circumstance requiring the dog to be acclimated requires the owner, trainer, or handler to leave it unattended for a period of greater than thirty minutes. Simply adding acclimation to the list of exemptions would address this concern and allow dogs to be safely prepared for the tasks they are trained to perform.

Again, the AKC agrees and supports the intent of House Bill 81. We believe adding language that considers the age, breed, general health and condition of the dog and its ability to withstand the environment will ensure that all dogs are protected. Additionally, by adding acclimation to the list of exemptions any unintended consequence associated with preparing a dog for task, like search and rescue, will be eliminated.

As always, the AKC and our local kennel clubs welcome the opportunity to work with you to promote effective solutions to protect dogs in Maryland. Please do not hesitate to contact us at (919) 816-3720 or doglaw@akc.org if we can provide further assistance on this issue. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charley Hall".

Charley Hall
Legislative Analyst/Community Outreach Coordinator