



Senate Bill 760

Criminal Law – Animal Cruelty – Petition for Costs for Care of Seized Animal

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Judicial Proceedings Committee

Date: March 10, 2021

From: Devin Neil

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 760. This bill creates a reasonable process to ensure that a person committing animal cruelty can be court-ordered to pay the cost of care provided to the animal by a local control agency or shelter.

Animals seized due to the owner's cruelty are held in a shelter while the cruelty charges are being prosecuted. Such cases can last months, even years. From the time the animal is seized until it is either forfeited or returned to the owner, the shelter incurs numerous costs. The seized animals are often suffering from the abuse and neglect of their owners, and in need of special care. Shelter expenses include seizing, feeding, sheltering, providing medical care, or disposing of the animal. These costs add up quickly and can be significant for the local agencies.

SB 760 addresses this issue by authorizing the court as a condition of sentencing to order a defendant to pay reasonable costs incurred in removing, housing, treating, or euthanizing an animal that was confiscated from the defendant. The petition is not automatic, it is an option to be granted by the courts. This system places a fair burden on the defendant to reimburse the agencies that remove and care for the animals if court-ordered to do so, and it also provides safeguards for the defendant by ensuring they are only potentially liable for these costs if they have been convicted in court.

SB 760 helps local animal control agencies recoup the reasonable costs for lawfully seized animals in their care by making sure owners convicted of animal cruelty can be held responsible by the courts for these costs. For this reason, MACo requests a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 760.