



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Senator Justin Ready
SB 760– Senator Ready
Criminal Law – Animal Cruelty – Petition for Costs for Care of Seized Animal

Chairman Smith and fellow members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

As amended, SB 760 is a commonsense bill that provides for affordable preservation of humane treatment of animals in Maryland. **Cost of animal care legislation is smart, reasonable legislation that puts the cost of caring for animals where it belongs - with the person who is responsible.**

This legislation establishes a legal process for individuals who have their animals seized due to animal cruelty charges, and only requires the owner to pay for the cost of care **IF** the court determines the seizure was lawful.

One of the greatest obstacles when enforcing animal cruelty laws is the huge cost associated with caring for abused animals while cruelty charges are prosecuted. SB 760 prevents animal control agencies from incurring debilitating costs in animal cruelty cases and holds abusers accountable for their actions. At the hearing, the seizing agency must present evidence that demonstrates reasonable cost of care for the animal and that the seizure was warranted – charges would be capped at no more than \$15/day plus necessary veterinary costs. The owner would be required to post a bond in amount determined by court. If ultimately found not guilty in the criminal trial, they will have their bond payment returned.

Currently the alleged violator may file a petition for the return of the animal within 10 days or the animal will be considered forfeited. Under this bill, the county district court is required to hold a hearing within 21 days from day the animal/s were seized. If the owner fails to post bond, ownership of the animal is relinquished, and the seizing authority can adopt the animal out.

For major animal cruelty cases, such as dog fighting, or hoarding cases, seizure of dozens of animals is common. The cost of care for these animals for months or years with cruelty charges pending is a devastating cost to county budgets. Financially strapped centers can be forced to turn away adoptable animals due to limited resources.

Thirty-six states have similar mechanisms in their law to shift the cost of caring for the seized animals from the county animal control agencies to the owners. The Maryland Cost of Animal Care Act is essential towards protecting the humane treatment of animals in our state.

I respectfully request a **favorable** vote on Senate Bill 760.