



January 13, 2022

Environment and Transportation Committee

HB16

Crimes - Unattended Dogs – Extreme Weather Conditions and Heat

FAVORABLE

The Humane Society of the United States, on behalf of our members and supporters in Maryland, urge a favorable report on HB16, “Crimes – Unattended Dogs – Extreme Weather Conditions and Heat.” Cases of dogs left outside in dangerous weather are one of the most reported types of animal cruelty, but the vagueness of Maryland’s current law makes it difficult for enforcement officers to act before a dog has suffered injury or death due to exposure. HB16 is very commonsense legislation, simply requiring that dogs are provided proper shelter when temperatures are below 32 or during a heat advisory, or if there is a severe weather warning issued by the National Weather Service.

January’s brutally cold nights have highlighted the need for HB16, as the new year has already brought snow, ice, and record cold. 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 arctic 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. HB16 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, HB16 is clear and enforceable, designed to solve a problem at hand, and reasonable for citizens to comply. The amendments added this summer reflect concerns raised by members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee and ensure that the law can be implemented fairly by all residents across the state. HB16 will protect dogs who live outdoors without creating an undue hardship for owners, and we urge a favorable report.

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