



STATEMENT OF PAUL A. LOCKE, JD, DRPH AND ANDREA UHLIG, MHS
IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 279
9 FEBRUARY 2023

Our names are Paul Locke and Andrea Uhlig, and we are an Associate Professor in the Department of Environmental Health and Engineering at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore Maryland and a senior research assistant for the same department and school, respectively. Dr. Locke holds a doctoral degree in environmental health sciences and is also an attorney. He is admitted to practice before the bars of the State of New York and the District of Columbia, and the bar of the United States Supreme Court.¹ Ms. Uhlig has a Master of Health Sciences degree from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health focusing on Environmental Health.

As Hopkins scientists, along with our colleagues, we have been studying issues associated with pets – also called companion animals – and their role in improving public health and welfare.² Our aim in submitting this testimony is to bring these experiences and research perspectives into the analysis of SB 279. In addition, before his appointment at Hopkins, Dr. Locke’s was engaged in the practice of law. He represented clients in environmental matters and also advised them regarding real estate transactions. This testimony also captures lessons from Dr. Locke’s legal work.

As we understand it, SB 279 is meant to protect pets and their owners. It sets out a four-part strategy to achieve its objectives. First, the bill requires that the Department of Agriculture develop a fact sheet. This fact sheet will provide information about how to care for and protect companion animals if a person is evicted or loses possession of their real property. The fact sheet must include information about state and local resources, including animal shelters and animal rescue organizations. Second, if a landlord knows that a tenant has a companion animal, the bill requires that the landlord include in their lease a description of this fact sheet, and where it is located. Third, the bill requires that certain warrants issued for tenant eviction or loss of real property include information about where the fact sheet is located. Fourth, the bill requires that when real property is delivered back to a landlord or other person, an appropriate state or local official must take certain actions to make sure that companion animals are not abandoned, and provide information to their owners about the shelter and/or rescue organization to which the companion animals were taken, and vice versa.

As we explain below, the provisions of Senate Bill 279 align squarely with public health science and standard practices in disclosure in real estate law. Based on our research and practice, we believe that SB 279 will benefit Marylanders, and we strongly support its passage.

¹ Dr. Paul Locke is not admitted to practice law in Maryland.

² Our companion animal/one health research was supported by a grant from the Lipitz Public Policy Award Program at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. It will be published in an upcoming issue of the Maryland Journal of Health Care Law & Policy.



1. *SB 279 is consistent with public health research and has the potential to improve public health for Maryland's citizens, especially those who own companion animals.*

As written, one of SB 279's objectives is to protect, and assist in care for, companion animals (domesticated cats and dogs) if Marylanders are evicted from a leasehold or lose possession of their real property. This is an important public health goal. Our research, and the research of other public health scientists, has demonstrated that the human-companion animal bond strengthens both individual and community health. This idea is accepted in the health community and is captured under the concept of "one health." The one health concept recognizes that the health of communities and individuals is closely related to the health of animals and our shared environment. A key one health concept is that the human-companion animal bond that develops between pets and owners enhances human health.

Simply put, when the human-pet bond is broken, public health suffers. This is especially true among those in low income and vulnerable communities – those Marylanders at much higher risk of being evicted. Passage of SB 279 will be of great benefit to these families.

SB 279 incorporates a one health approach. Not only does it provide initial notice to tenants and landlords about how to care for animals in the event of eviction, the bill also creates an important follow-up mechanism so that if eviction occurs, the appropriate official can intervene to help preserve the companion animal-human bond. It also activates the animal shelter and animal rescue community. If a companion animal is taken to such a facility, the owner will be provided with information about where the companion animal is housed so that the owner and pet can be more easily reunited. In addition, the shelter or rescue facility will receive information about the pet owners so that they can reach out directly and attempt to reunite people with their pets.

2. *SB 279's lease provisions reflect standard practices in real estate disclosure.*

It is standard practice to add environmental and other disclosures to written landlord-tenant lease agreements. Such provisions protect both tenants and landlords by clarifying rights and responsibilities and giving notice about additional resources. One common example is the federal law provision relating to disclosure about potential lead hazards that is required to be made for most rental property that was constructed prior to 1978. The provision in SB 279 requiring a description of the Department of Agriculture's Pet Protection fact sheet falls squarely within this standard practice. Like other such disclosures, it reflects an incremental change that has considerable potential health benefits, as explained in under heading 1.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on this important bill. If you have any questions about our testimony, or need more information, please contact us via email at auhlig3@jhu.edu and plocke@jhu.edu.

Please be aware that we are submitting this testimony in our individual capacity and that the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Johns Hopkins University or Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.