



MARYLAND VOTES FOR ANIMALS

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March 8, 2023

To: House Judiciary Committee
From: Lisa Radov, President and Chair, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.
Re: Criminal Law – Animal Cruelty – Suspected Commission by a Minor HB 1192- Support

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Lisa Radov. I am the President and Chair of Maryland Votes for Animals. We champion humane legislation to improve the lives of animals in Maryland. Speaking for Maryland Votes for Animals, our Board of Directors, and our members across Maryland, I respectfully request that the Judiciary Committee vote favorably for Criminal Law – Animal Cruelty – Suspected Commission by a Minor – HB 1192.

This bill would require an officer or authorized agent of a humane society to investigate a suspected case of animal cruelty committed by a minor and authorizing the officer or authorized agent to coordinate with certain social services entities to conduct certain evaluations, monitoring, and support of a minor suspected of committing animal cruelty; authorizing an officer or authorized agent of a humane society or a police officer or other public official required to protect animals to seize an animal if necessary for the protection of the animal under certain circumstances.

This bill seeks to address the safety concerns for not only animals if there is alleged cruelty but also for all people residing in that household. Research has shown there is a relationship, called The Link, between animal cruelty, domestic abuse, elder abuse, and child abuse.

When children are cruel to animals it is not necessarily an exploratory stage of development. In addition to causing pain and suffering to the animals, animal abuse can be a sentinel indicator and predictor — one of the earliest "red flag" warning signs of concurrent or future violent acts. Abusers and impressionable children who witness or perpetrate abuse become desensitized to violence and the ability to empathize with victims. Abuse is often cyclical and inter-generational. The earlier professionals can intervene to break the cycles of violence, the higher the rate of success.

This bill applies to minors, so when there is animal cruelty, this bill provides a method on how to intervene in a way to protect the parents, siblings, or grandparents in their family as well as other animals in the home from harm - The Link. What makes this bill important is the ability of the officer or authorized agent to encourage a constructive outcome with the involvement of social services. This type of interaction is the proactive direction that reflects the emphasis on mental health to not only prevent further animal abuse and not be a danger to others in his/household, but also to enable that young person to go on to potentially realize their potential and live a productive life.

We are aware that there are some legal questions about the section of the bill that deals with the seizure of animals would be open to working with the sponsor and advocates to amend the bill such that those issues are properly addressed.

In closing, I would like to thank Delegate Smith for her sponsorship of HB 1192 and ask the committee to give this bill a favorable report.