

House Bill 1192

TO: Members of the Judiciary Committee

DATE: March 6, 2023

FROM: Caroline A. Griffin, Esquire *CAF*

RE: **HB 1192 – Criminal Law – Animal Cruelty – Suspected Commission by a Minor**

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chairman Clippinger, Vice-Chair Moon, and Members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Caroline A. Griffin; I am an attorney and reside in Baltimore City. I served as the first Chair of the Baltimore Mayor's Anti-Animal Abuse Advisory Commission from 2009 – 2013 and currently chair the Maryland Spay Neuter Advisory Board. I am the co-founder of the non-profit Show Your Soft Side, a national anti-cruelty campaign, and serve on the Board of the Animal Welfare Institute. I support HB 1192 – Criminal Law – Animal Cruelty – Suspected Commission by a Minor, which provides critical protections for minors, animals, and the public.

Former Baltimore Mayor Sheila Dixon appointed me to serve as Chair of the Baltimore Anti-Animal Abuse Advisory Commission in 2009, following the burning death of a dog that came to be known as Phoenix. The case made national headlines when two teenaged twin boys were charged with the crime. Although animal cruelty was rampant in Baltimore City at the time, the worst cases were perpetrated by juveniles. Teenaged boys similarly set a cat on fire and boys in middle school beat an 8-week-old puppy to death with belts and a tree branch in broad daylight in a public park.

In response to this trilogy of horrific cases, I co-founded the non-profit Show Your Soft Side, an anti-cruelty public service campaign, that seeks to deter these crimes by utilizing celebrity role models, such as NFL players, to demonstrate to youth that compassion toward animals is a strength. We have recruited 250 celebrity ambassadors nationwide.

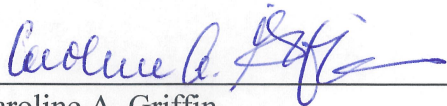
HB1192 is remedial and protects minors, as children who engage in animal cruelty are more than twice as likely to have suffered abuse or neglect themselves.ⁱ Alarming, several studies have examined the link between children who have been sexually abused and then proceed to harm animals.ⁱⁱ In other cases, animal cruelty is a learned behavior.ⁱⁱⁱ

Childhood animal cruelty may indicate a conduct disorder and is linked to other antisocial behaviors, particularly bullying of peers.^{iv} HB 1192 provides for ongoing monitoring and support from appropriate social service entities, thereby providing needed services to the minors who engage in these crimes, while also protecting the public.

I continue to learn of shocking cases of animal cruelty perpetrated by children in Maryland. In recent months, a 6-year girl placed a cat in a microwave oven and an 8-year girl killed a homeless cat. These cases warrant investigation, referrals to social service entities, and ongoing monitoring.

In all likelihood, Section C of the bill will need to be amended to create a clear process for the seizure of an animal that has been abused or is at risk of abuse. The Baltimore City Code has such a civil seizure process that ensures due process considerations are met, while enabling animal enforcement officers to take action to remove an animal in danger. Under this structure, no criminal charges are brought against families and animals are protected from harm.

Respectfully submitted,



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Date

ⁱ Fiona S. McEwen, *et al.* *Is Childhood Cruelty to Animals a Marker for Physical Maltreatment in a Prospective Cohort Study of Children?*, 38 CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 533 (2014).

ⁱⁱ Fiona Becker & Lesley French, *Making the Links: Child Abuse, Animal Cruelty and Domestic Violence*, 13 CHILD ABUSE REV. 399 (2004).

ⁱⁱⁱ Roshni Trehan Ladny & Laura Meyer, *Traumatized Witnesses: Review of Childhood Exposure to Animal Cruelty*, 13 J. CHILD & ADOLESCENT TRAUMA 527 (2019).

^{iv} American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DMS-III); Denise Parkes & Tania Signal, *Revisiting a Link: Animal Abuse, Bullying, and Empathy in Australian Youth*, 5 HUMAN-ANIMAL INTERACTION BULL. No. 1, 2017, at 26.