



**April 3, 2024**

**Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**SB 1148**

***Criminal Law - Cruelty to Law Enforcement Animals - Recklessness***

**FAVORABLE**

The Humane Society of the United States, Maryland Votes for Animals, and the Professional Animal Workers of Maryland urge a favorable report on SB 1148. This bill changes the threshold for intent required to charge an individual with cruelty to law enforcement animals.

We owe a debt of gratitude to our law enforcement working dogs, who provide services that cannot be replicated by people or machines. These dogs serve as invaluable members of SWAT teams; detect illegal drugs or explosives; identify evidence, such as trace elements of blood, at crime scenes; and track down and secure criminals. These dogs truly serve on the front lines and deserve the highest possible protections. And dogs are not the only animals that work with law enforcement; several police departments still utilize horses for community outreach and crowd control.

Currently, to prove cruelty against these law enforcement animals the prosecution must demonstrate intent to harm the animal. That is a very high threshold, especially if the animal is encountering the individual out of sight of the officer. Given the service these animals provide and the high risk of danger they encounter, lowering the threshold to a recklessness standard is fair and appropriate.

Ensuring that acts of cruelty towards law enforcement animals can be easily prosecuted will increase protection for these animals and also act as a deterrent to an individual harming them.

We urge a favorable report on SB1148 to ensure that law enforcement dogs, who put their lives on the line for us every day, are themselves better protected from harm.

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