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Judicial Proceedings Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 1st, 2024

The Maryland State Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
2 East Miller Senate Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Senate Bill 17: *Criminal Law – Crimes Relating to Animals – Conviction and Sentencing*

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee,

Under current Maryland law, a person who serially abuses multiple dogs, cats, horses or any other animals in violation of the laws prohibiting animal cruelty is only charged once regardless of how many animals have been abused. So a person keeping multiple dogs, for example, in unspeakably cruel confinement can only be convicted of a single crime of animal abuse.

It is hard to contemplate how a human being could possibly set about to subject any living creature to such abuse, but the newspapers periodically report situations in which literally dozens of innocent animals have been horrifically treated. When we catch people engaging in such reprehensible conduct, we need to impose appropriate punishments. Abusing a single animal is bad enough; abusing multiple animals represents an pattern of such cruelty that a much stiffer punishment is warranted.

According to the Calvert County State's Attorney's Office, the standard defendant in these animal abuse cases harm multiple animals in multiple instances, rather than one-off occurrences. As awful as it sounds, this is what is happening.

Senate Bill 17 allows for each instance of abuse and each animal abused to be the basis of separate charges. It states that each animal harmed in a violation of the "Crimes Relating to Animals Subtitle of the Criminal Law Article will be a separate offense and that a conviction under Subtitle 6 will not merge with a conviction for any other crime based on the at establishing the violation. In this way, Senate Bill 17 will help to better prosecute individuals involved in the most deprived forms of animal abuse.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of Senate Bill 17 and will be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.