



## MARYLAND VOTES FOR ANIMALS

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March 26, 2024

To: House Judiciary Committee  
From: Lisa Radov, President and Chairman, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.  
Re: Criminal Law - Crimes Relating to Animals - Conviction and Sentencing- SB 17 - Support

Chair Clippinger, Vice - Chair Bartlett, members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Lisa Radov and I am the President and Chairman of the Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc. We champion legislation to improve the lives of animals in Maryland. On behalf of our board of directors, as well as the thousands of members of Maryland Votes for Animals, I respectfully ask that this committee vote favorably for Criminal Law - Crimes Relating to Animals - Conviction and Sentencing – SB 17.

We support the bill as amended by the JPR committee; that amendment strengthened the bill by directly addressing the Sentencing Commission decision. We appreciate the hard work by the sponsor to identify alternative language that satisfies the goal of the floor amendment, and recommend the committee move the bill with this revised amendment included.

This bill would establish that each animal harmed in a violation of a prohibition against animal cruelty is a separate offense, that a conviction for a crime relating to animals may not merge with a conviction for any other crime based on the act establishing the violation, and that a sentence imposed may be separate from and consecutive to or concurrent with a sentence based on the act establishing a violation. Essentially, this bill would correct an error in the state code to ensure that in cases where an individual is accused of animal cruelty to multiple animals that charges can be brought for each animal.

When the Maryland Sentencing Commission met in May, they determined that animal cruelty sentences should not stack when there are multiple animals involved, including felony cases like dog fighting or hoarding. Our shelter and rescue partners were very concerned that offenses for animal cruelty cases could not be stacked. By making this determination, animals have less protection.

This bill does not create new penalties. It returns a tool to the toolbox that would once again hold perpetrators accountable for each animal. In these cases, we are talking about purposely inflicting the worst cruelty on animals and would be used only in the rare cases of these crimes on multiple animals.

I would like to thank Senator West for his sponsorship of this bill and urge a favorable report.