



**Maryland's Association of Animal Care and Control
Agencies and Humane Societies**

**PO Box 1143
Easton, Maryland 21601**

**SB0744 Juvenile Law-Reform
Maryland House of Delegates Judiciary Committee**

February 6, 2024

Dear Honorable Chairman Clippinger, Vice-Chair Bartlett, and members of the committee:

Professional Animal Workers of Maryland, the state organization comprised of animal control agencies and humane societies unanimously wishes to thank this committee for your inclusion of "Title 10-606"-Felony animal crimes to the House version of this bill. Our organization's support is specifically for the inclusion of felony crimes against animals be added to the list of charges that can be brought against a minor between the ages of 10 and 12 years old. We respectfully request this be re-added to SB0744.

As has been shared with your committee earlier this session, it is an unfortunate truth that young children do engage in acts of aggravated animal abuse. These acts put animals in danger and are a cry for help. Without the ability to bring criminal charges, Animal Control Officers have little to no recourse available when they suspect animal crimes by a minor. This means officers cannot remove the animal from the home, leaving the animals potentially subject to continued abuse. In addition, they cannot access the support systems that are in place within the juvenile justice system for the offender. We know that too often, children who abuse animals are abused themselves. Minors suspected of animal abuse often need help just as much as the animals they abuse. Unfortunately, those services are often only available through the juvenile justice system.

Professional Animal Workers of Maryland recognizes the efforts to move away from felony convictions and to decrease incarceration within Maryland. These cases are rare occurrences, however when they do occur, they warrant legal recourse. Animals in Maryland are caught in a legal dilemma; they are technically property, but as living creatures that are often severely injured or killed in these cases, crimes against animals should allow for criminal charges and the supports that can be provided to juveniles with those charges.

Professional Animal Workers of Maryland believes the passing of SB0744 is a crucial tool in protecting the animals and people of Maryland.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Patty Crankshaw-Quimby, CAWA

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