



## THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

March 26, 2024

Judiciary Committee

SB 17

*Criminal Law - Crimes Relating to Animals - Conviction and Sentencing*

**FAVORABLE**

The Humane Society of the United States, on behalf of our members and supporters in Maryland, urges a favorable report on SB 17. This bill seeks to restore the ability to bring multiple charges in cases where multiple animals are seriously abused or neglected.

Animal related criminal cases often represent the worst animal crimes that occur – from dog fighting to sexual assault. Prosecutors have always had the ability to stack charges in these cases, but last May a decision by the Maryland Sentencing Commission took away that ability due to a technicality in the law.

Maryland is making a concerted effort to move away from criminal convictions and to decrease incarceration. But animals, while legally property, are also living creatures; this puts them in a grey area between physical possessions, for which charges can no longer be stacked, and people, where criminal charges can still be stacked. The HSUS understands the progress made by this committee and has not supported efforts to increase penalties for misdemeanor animal crimes. But we do feel strongly that in the most horrific cases – cases including multiple suffering by living creatures – animals should be treated differently than a television or a car.

It is critical to note that this bill expressly allows sentences to run concurrently or to be suspended entirely. This bill is not about increasing incarceration, it is about accountability. And for animal crimes with high recidivism rates, having charges for each animal impacted can be a powerful tool in preventing re-offending.

The Senate made two changes to this bill. First, the Committee added language clarifying that for purposes of sentencing under this section only, animals should be considered victims. That amendment was deemed necessary to ensure that the bill directly addressed the Sentencing Commission decision. We support those changes.

Second, the Senate floor made changes to ensure that the bill would not impact normal hunting or fishing practices. We worked with the Senate and House sponsor and the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus to draft more finely tuned amendments; we request the committee strike the floor amendment and add the amendment that will be offered by Delegate Embry instead.

We urge a favorable report on SB17 to ensure that every life lost has its day in court.

*For more information contact Jennifer Bevan-Dangel, Maryland State Director  
[jbevandangel@humanesociety.org](mailto:jbevandangel@humanesociety.org) | C 410-303-7954*