

February 18, 2024

Dear Honorable Chairman Barnes, Vice-Chair Chang, and members of the committee: My name is Katie Flory and I am the community care & Advocacy Director for the Maryland SPCA. The Maryland SPCA supports and encourages a favorable and speedy report on HB 643 Loan Assistance Repayment Program- Eligibility.

Animal shelters across Maryland, in your counties and communities, are in crisis. The public has expectations- as do we in the field- that we will save every animal possible, no matter their medical condition, however the lack of affordable and attainable veterinary care has become problematic for almost every shelter in the state. There are many variables involved in this crisis. Cost increases, fewer students entering the work force into the veterinary field and the increase in animals entering our care as shelters. HB 643 asks to include those entering veterinary medicine who attended a Maryland state college or university, being licensed in Maryland to receive help from the loan forgiveness program upon volunteering at a Maryland animal shelter.

The benefits to this are multi-fold. The veterinarian receives aid, the shelters have the help we so desperately need at no cost and animals in our shelters which enter our homes and communities are healthier. Between January 21, 2025 and February 1, 2025 the MD SPCA took in 98 dogs. One of our vets was very ill and because we do not have other resources, we could not provide spay/neuter services or see the most critically ill pets for several days. This is one of hundreds of example from around the state. The Maryland SPCA believes the passing of HB 643 is a valuable tool in our work to serve the animals and people of Maryland. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.