



MARYLAND VOTES FOR ANIMALS

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January 23, 2025

To: House Judiciary Committee

From: Lisa Radov, President and Chair, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.

Re: Criminal Law - Crimes Relating to Animals - Conviction and Sentencing- HB 89 -Support

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Lisa Radov. I am the President and Chair of Maryland Votes for Animals. We champion humane legislation to improve the lives of animals in Maryland. Speaking for Maryland Votes for Animals, our Board of Directors, and our members across Maryland, I respectfully request that the Judiciary Committee vote favorably for Criminal Law - Crimes Relating to Animals - Conviction and Sentencing – HB 89.

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. We are aware that the bill may require some technical amendments and will work with the sponsor to ensure that the final language is ready for passage this session.

Last session, this bill had unanimous support and passed 128-0 in the House. We appreciate the early bill hearing and hope that this committee will continue to move this bill forward.

In closing, I would like to thank Delegate Embry for her sponsorship of HB 89 and ask the committee to give this bill a favorable report.