



THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

January 23, 2025

Judiciary Committee

HB 89

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 HB 89. 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. Each charge represents an animal that has been intentionally, severely, and cruelly treated. Prosecutors have always had the ability to stack charges in these cases, but a decision in May of 2023 by the Maryland Sentencing Commission took away that ability due to a technicality in the law.

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 charges can still be stacked. Maryland is making a concerted effort to move away from convictions and to decrease incarceration. 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 cases of violence against living creatures animals should be treated differently than a television or a car.

We are happy to work with this committee to ensure that the provision in the legislation that classifies animals as victims is truly limited to only the stacking provisions of this subtitle. We do not intend for this bill to reclassify animals as victims for other purposes under the law.

We appreciate the unanimous support in both chambers for this bill last year and urge a favorable report and speedy passage on HB 89 to ensure that every life lost has its day in court.

*For more information contact the Humane Society of the United States
Maryland State Director | Maryland@humanesociety.org*