



Formerly called the Humane
Society of the United States and
Humane Society International

1255 23rd St. NW, Suite 450

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February 25, 2026

Environment and Transportation Committee

**HB912 - Local Government - Trap-Neuter-Return Policies for Community Cats -
Requirements and Restrictions (Ash's Law)
FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT**

On behalf of Humane World for Animals, formerly called the Humane Society of the United States, on behalf of our supporters across the state, we respectfully urge a favorable vote on HB912.

The bill provides essential protections for both community cats and the residents who work tirelessly to humanely manage their populations. By clarifying that trap-neuter-return (TNR) activities do not constitute “abandonment,” the bill removes a significant barrier to effective, science-based population control. States including South Dakota, Texas, and Rhode Island have enacted similar clarifications in recent years.

HB 0912 also establishes TNR as the preferred disposition of an impounded community cat, which will provide local governments confidence in implementing such programs. Maryland already supports TNR statewide as the Maryland Department of Agriculture Spay and Neuter Grants Program funds local organizations to provide free or low-cost spay/neuter services, targeting free-roaming cats and TNR programs as well as low-income residents.

Across Maryland, communities seeking to reduce the number of unowned cats entering municipal and private shelters rely on TNR. This approach not only improves outcomes for the cats themselves but also prevents countless litters from being born outdoors. TNR reduces nuisance behaviors associated with mating, which are often the source of resident complaints. Vaccinating free roaming cats against rabies and other common feline diseases helps prevent outbreaks and reduces risks to public health. Research consistently shows that TNR stabilizes, reduces, and can ultimately eliminate free roaming cat populations, making it an indispensable tool for animal welfare professionals.

Because of the high number of free roaming cats, municipal shelters and animal control agencies depend on residents’ participation in trapping efforts. Volunteers or residents often capture cats, transport them for veterinary care, and return them to their outdoor homes. In many cases, the person who traps and transports a cat is not the same person who provides ongoing care. Experienced TNR volunteers frequently assist caregivers who feed cats but cannot manage transportation or veterinary appointments. For this reason, the act of returning a

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For questions, please reach out to Maryland State Director Stacey Volodin at svolodin@humaneworld.org



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cat should not be considered abandonment even when the person doing so will not be the cat's long-term caretaker.

However, uncertainty about whether TNR might technically violate state abandonment laws has led some local governments to hesitate in adopting policies that support these programs. This ambiguity limits their ability to address cat populations and community concerns effectively. The American Bar Association, in a 2017 resolution supporting TNR, emphasized that abandonment laws should not be interpreted in ways that prevent the return of cats. The ABA specifically recommended that "for clarity, the abandonment law should expressly exempt TNR 'return' of ear tipped community cats." HB 0912 provides the clarity local officials need to confidently implement humane, evidence-based strategies.

The American Bar Association, the National Animal Care and Control Association, the Feline Veterinary Medical Association are just some of the professional organizations supporting TNR and encouraging the adoption of policies that make it the preferred management strategy for free-roaming community cats. HB 0912 provides guidelines for counties and municipalities for authorizing TNR and providing opportunities for cats cared for in a community are able to be returned to that community if they should be impounded at shelter. These simple requirements can prevent the unnecessary euthanasia of many community cats who are often not well-suited to traditional adoption into homes. In turn, this can reduce stress on shelter staff, who make career choices based on a desire to help animals not harm them, thus reducing staff turnover and providing more stability in local governments' ability to provide sustainable animal welfare services.

Effective public policy encourages best practices rather than creating obstacles for residents who want to help. High sterilization rates are essential to meaningfully reduce cat overpopulation. Maryland needs as many residents as possible engaged in TNR efforts, and removing legal uncertainty is critical to achieving that goal. The state already supports TNR through the state spay and neuter grant program, thus making it the preferred tactic for managing community cats statewide is a natural progression. With the passage of HB 0912, Maryland can be a leader in animal welfare, making community members feel empowered—not threatened with prosecution—when taking responsible, compassionate action to reduce cat overpopulation and protect public health.

We appreciate the ongoing dialogue with the lead advocates regarding the concerns raised by the Professional Animal Workers of Maryland (PAWS), whose testimony highlights situations in which a site may not be safe for returning cats. This concern remains the sole reason that



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Humane World for Animals maintains a favorable-with-amendments position rather than offering exclusive support for the bill.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge a favorable vote on HB912.

Stacey Volodin

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