



February 25, 2026

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB0912- Local Government - Trap-Neuter-Return Policies for Community Cats - Requirements and Restrictions (Ash's Law)

Position: Neutral with amendments

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) cannot endorse or condone the policy of TNR. As we have asserted before it is cruel to cats, contributes significantly to the continued decline of our bird populations, and threatens human and wildlife help. Please see our policy statement on free-roaming cats for citations for these points.¹

As it is currently written, HB0912 would allow unregulated and unaccountable TNR colonies all over Maryland. We also wish to note that we all agree on several issues. We support trapping and neutering, just not the release/return part. So, in the spirit of cooperation and dialogue, we offer up amendments that would ameliorate most of the issues of regarding our birds and human and wildlife health.

In Section (II), we request that the word in (B) "Applies" be changed to "Suggests." Howard County has not adopted TNR and we know of one town on the Eastern Shore that has outlawed feeding outdoor cats. No county or municipality should be compelled to adopt a TNR policy it does not want.

We also request that C-1 be deleted. Counties with TNR should have the ability to institute registration and certification for TNR colonies and community cat caregivers. Counties and municipalities have a vested interest in monitoring where colonies are placed, and how they are operated.

C-3 is also problematic. Why is caregiver exempted from having to identify themselves? Anyone could come in off the street and demand a cat. This clause invites fraud, for example cats are often used as "bait" to train illegal fighting dogs.

C-5 should be struck. The stipulation that the preferred disposition of an impounded cat is to be TNR is unconscionable. Under all circumstances, if the welfare of the cat is indeed the goal, the preferred disposition should be adoption.

We also request that standards be imposed on colonies that will significantly reduce the toll on birds and other wildlife, while promoting public and wildlife health.

It is undeniable that cat colonies can be reservoir for rabies. While TNR requires rabies vaccination, boosters must be given periodically to maintain immunity. Cats can also catch

rabies from wildlife and, in turn, infect wildlife. According to the CDC there have been 109 rabid cats reported in Maryland since 2019. In August 2024, a rabid cat was identified in a colony in Cecil County, and it was initially thought that 309 persons were exposed to the disease. After extensive and expensive investigation, only 3 persons required very expensive postexposure prophylaxis.² Wildlife rehabilitators, who handle foxes, skunks, and other mammals are required to get rabies inoculations. Community cat caregivers should likewise be required to get inoculated against rabies, for their own protection.

In order to lower the threat of rabies from wildlife, colonies should never be located in parks, forests, meadows, open space, wildlife and natural resources areas, state forest, reserves, anywhere where they can interact with wildlife. This way rabies infection from wild animals or infecting of wildlife by cats can be prevented. It would also limit the spread of Toxoplasmosis. An added benefit of keeping colonies out of such areas it that it will virtually eliminate cat predation on birds and other wildlife. Colonies should also be kept out residential areas and schools, to prevent exposure of children to rabies and Toxoplasmosis. Likewise, they should be kept out of areas of food production and food handling, such as farms, supermarkets, food processing facilities, etc. Toxoplasmosis is serious threat to unborn babies, and those with compromised immune systems.³ It can infect any mammal, including domestic livestock. It has also been found in white-tailed deer and has been implicated in steep decline of sea otters in California.⁴ Wild cats are also susceptible, but only as hosts. Bobcats were just documented as breeding in Howard County last May, when prints of a mother and cub were found at Triadelphia Reservoir.⁵ Bobcats have also been confirmed in six other Maryland Counties.⁶ Infected bobcats can spread Toxoplasmosis far afield from colonies, which can then infect deer and other mammals.

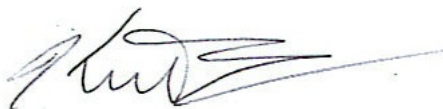
A firm definition of what constitutes a “managed colony” is needed. This should include siting and oversight. In addition, better identification for cats than ear-tipping are needed. Small microchips can be used and scanned for vaccination records, which would help ensure immunity is preserved.

Free-roaming cats kill between 1.4 and 3.7 billion birds per year in the United States, according to peer-reviewed science.⁷ TNR colonies concentrate numbers of cats, multiplying the predation problem in the vicinity of a colony.

MOS is a Maryland-based volunteer organization, founded in 1945 of 2600 members, organized into 15 chapters throughout the state. MOS is devoted to the study, conservation and enjoyment of birds and their habitat.

In conclusion, we cannot support HB0912 but offer above some amendments that will answer most of our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kurt R. Schwarz', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kurt R. Schwarz
Conservation Chair Emeritus

¹ Maryland Ornithological Society, Policy Statement on Free-Roaming Domestic Cats and the Management of Feral Cats, August 29, 2015, https://mdbirds.org/wp-content/uploads/MOS_Feral_Cats_2019.pdf

² Ludmer, Sarah, et al, Rabies Outbreak in an Urban, Unmanaged Cat Colony-Maryland, August 2024, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, CDC, August 21, 2025, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/74/wr/mm7431a2.htm>

³ CDC, About Toxoplasmosis, March 11, 2025, <https://www.cdc.gov/toxoplasmosis/about/index.html>

⁴ The Marine Mammal Center, Toxoplasmosis Poses Threat for Sea Otters like Yankee Doodle, September 5, 2017, <https://www.marinemammalcenter.org/news/toxoplasmosis-poses-threat-for-sea-otters-like-yankee-doodle>

⁵ Bobcat, iNaturalist, May 7, 2025, <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/279247719>

⁶ Bobcat, Maryland Biodiversity Project, accessed February 22, 2026 <https://www.marylandbiodiversity.com/species/853>

⁷ Loss, et al, The impact of free-ranging domestic cats on wildlife of the United States, Nature Communications, 29 January 2013 <https://www.nature.com/articles/ncomms2380>