

February 23, 2026

Testimony to the esteemed members of the Maryland Environment Transportation Committee:

I am a Maryland resident and urge you to vote NO on House Bill 0912, which would legalize widespread abandonment of domestic cats regardless of their health or temperament, putting both cats and wildlife at grave risk while increasing their threat to public health. **This legislation is BAD for outdoor cats, BAD for small animals and our ecosystems, and BAD for public health.** Since all counties in Maryland except Howard County have TNR policies, this appears to be an end run by well-intended but imbalanced outdoor cat advocates to override a prudent decision made 2 years ago by Howard County not to adopt TNR as it was written. Legislation abounds to place limits on human trespass and leash laws for dogs for instance, but outdoor cat advocates expect “their cats” to have no such limits...to be given a free pass from any constraints despite the consequences of letting outdoor cats roam.

This bill proposes not only to leave domestic cats outdoors to fend for themselves under the guise of trap, neuter, and release (TNR), but seeks to limit local government’s ability to oversee such operations and effectively address resident complaints. The **trap, neuter, and vaccinate** aspects of TNR are **good** for outdoor cats and public health. The problem comes when the animals are **released** back outside. We should no more release neutered, vaccinated feral cats outside than we release our big cats from the local zoo. The only difference here being that because big cats threaten humans, they are contained and the small cats do not threaten us, so they are given a free pass. We contain our non-native big cats humanely and should do the same thing with small cats. More later in my testimony about how that is already being done by people that REALLY care about outdoor cats.

There is a lot to like about cats! They are cute, cuddly adorable **domestic** pets. I love indoor cats, but outdoor cats, cats released outside, are a non-native, invasive, highly efficient predator that kills native small animals with impunity. Some statistics place the annual death toll of ground birds due to outdoor cat predation in North America at somewhere between **2.5 to 3 billion** birds a year! Outdoor cats not only kill for food; they also do it for sport--it is part of their nature. In addition, the lives of the outdoor cats are not great either. Outdoor cats live a brutal, unhealthy shorter existence.

In Howard County, we don’t just talk about protecting outdoor cats, we have acted. Last year, our Howard County bird club began donating \$5000 annually to the Howard County animal shelter to facilitate **indoor** cat adoptions and offers monetary assistance to Howard County residents to build catios (attached or unattached containment enclosures) for outdoor cats to **protect** the cats that may not be adoptable in an enclosure and while keeping them from ruthlessly killing our small, native animals. We have directly contacted leading local outdoor cat advocates in Howard County and publicized our catio offer through the leading local cat organization: Laurel Cats.

HB 0912 also lacks any provisions to protect the rights of private property owners, many of whom don't want cats trespassing. Frustrated property owners commonly take matters into their own

hands when they cannot get help, often poisoning, shooting, or otherwise harming and cruelly killing cats.

This bill endangers public health and safety. Every cat released incrementally increases public health risk from *Toxoplasmosis gondi* from feces in sand for instance, perhaps play areas for our children and permanent exposure for them, their parents and caretakers. For the cats, they are subject to cat AIDS they cannot overcome and many other maladies. Ultimately, outdoor cat caretakers can't always keep up with vaccinations in their very loosely managed "cat communities." Irresponsible people drop their unwanted cats off in these communities. In August '24 in Baltimore, in an "unmanaged" cat community, one such unvaccinated cat exposed up to [309 people to rabies](#). The CDC report link is provided.

If you love cats and want to help outdoor cats, please DO NOT legislate their release after trapping, neutering and vaccination---pass a bill to require or fund catios or cat fences for released outdoor cats and require that in those confines that those that claim to care for outdoor cats REALLY take care of them beyond putting out a bowl of food that the cats will have to fight other cats and animals to consume when they do not catch live prey.

Please let's show some RESPONSIBLE balance here: protect the cats, protect small animals, protect public health, and respect the interests of ALL property owners in the state of Maryland.

Please vote NO on HB 0912.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregg Petersen

Former President, Howard County Bird Club



Example catio with contented feral cats



Catio enclosure attached to a residence



Example outdoor fenced enclosure



A picture to show the heavy screening in one catio to ensure safety from wild animals-it's a harsh world for outdoor cats, so protecting them after neutering and vaccination in a shelter is how we should care for them.