



House Bill 135

Criminal Law – Cruelty to Animals – Seizure and Removal

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Judiciary Committee

Date: February 7, 2019

From: Natasha Mehu

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 135. This bill creates a reasonable process to ensure that an owner or custodian of an animal that has been seized or removed due to cruelty is liable for the cost of care provided to the animal by a local control agency or shelter while in their possession.

Animals seized due to the owner's cruelty are held in a shelter while the cruelty charges are being prosecuted. Such cases can last months, even years. From the time the animal is seized until it is either forfeited or returned to the owner – which again, could be years – the shelter incurs numerous costs. The seized animals are often suffering from the abuse and neglect of their owners, and are in need of special care. Shelter expenses include seizing, feeding, sheltering, providing medical care, or disposing of the animal. These costs add up quickly and can be quite significant for the local agencies.

HB 135 addresses this issue by providing a mechanism for these impounding agencies to recover the reasonable costs they have incurred. It places a fair burden on the owner to support this care by posting a bond for the costs, but it also provides safeguards for the owner by ensuring they are only liable for these costs if they have been convicted by the court. If they are found not guilty, they are entitled to the return of the bond.

HB 135 helps local animal control agencies recoup the reasonable costs for lawfully seized animals in their care by making sure owners convicted of animal cruelty are held responsible for these costs. For this reason, MACo requests a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 135.