



House Bill 362

Criminal Law – Costs of Care for Seized Animals

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Judiciary Committee

Date: March 4, 2015

From: Natasha Mehu

The Maryland Association of Counties **SUPPORTS** HB 362. 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 or neglect is liable for the care provided to the animal by a local control agency or shelter while in their possession.

In cases where an animal is seized due to the owner's cruelty or neglect, the animal is held in a shelter while the cruelty charges are being prosecuted. Cases can last months or even years. From the time the animal is seized until it is either forfeited or returned to the owner, the shelter incurs the costs associated with seizing, feeding, sheltering, providing medical care, or disposing of the animal. These costs add up quickly and can be quite significant for the local animal control agency or shelter housing the animal:

- Frederick County Animal Control incurred \$128,000 in costs associated for 92 cats seized and held for nine months.
- Queen Anne's County Animal Control incurred \$100,000 in costs for 136 abused horses.
- Calvert County Animal Control incurred \$2,801 in overtime pay for a rabbit seizure.

Maryland is one of the few states that does not have safeguards in place so that local animal control agencies and shelters are not left alone to shoulder the costs of caring for these animals. Often these animals are suffering from the abuse and neglect, and are in need of special care. HB 362 places a fair burden on the owner to support this care.

HB 362 helps local animal control agencies recoup the costs for lawfully seized animals in their care by making sure the owners are held responsible for these costs. For these reasons, MACo requests a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 362.