

COUNTY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE COUNTY, MARYLAND
Legislative Session 2026, Legislative Day No. 8

Bill No. 29-26

Mr. Michael Ertel, Chair
By Request of County Executive
&
Councilmembers Jones, Marks & Patoka

By the County Council, April 6, 2026

A BILL
ENTITLED

AN ACT concerning

Animals – Animal Protection and Humane Care

FOR the purpose of providing for certain standards for shelter for outside animals, veterinary care, and other care and treatment; establishing a reckless animal owner designation; authorizing an animal control officer to take certain actions; prohibiting a person from owning an animal under certain circumstances; and generally relating to animals and humane care and protection.

BY adding

Article 12 – Animals
Sections 12-3-301, 12-3-302, 12-3-303, 12-3-304, and 12-3-305
to be under the new “Subtitle 3. Animal Protection and Humane Care”
Baltimore County Code, 2015

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.
[Brackets] indicate matter stricken from existing law.
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter stricken from bill.
Underlining indicates amendments to bill.

Preamble

WHEREAS, providing standards as to what constitutes cruelty is necessary to prevent cruelty to animals; and

WHEREAS, defining what constitutes suitable shelter and requiring veterinary care and the use of certain items will provide guidance to owners of animals and to animal control officers to keep animals safe and healthy; and

WHEREAS, Baltimore County has adopted a title of law relating to Animal Welfare; and

WHEREAS, this title includes provisions relating to an animal owner’s responsibilities, as well as general prohibitions and requirements; and

WHEREAS, this legislation intends to modernize and broaden this title of the Baltimore County Code to include animal welfare and the humane treatment of animals by owners as a new subtitle in the Animal Welfare title; and

WHEREAS, creating a new category of a reckless animal owner may prevent animals from experiencing cruelty and neglect by owners who refuse to follow the requirements of humane care for animals; now therefore

1 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE

2 COUNTY, MARYLAND, that Laws of Baltimore County read as follows:

3

4

ARTICLE 12 – ANIMALS

5

Title 3 – Animal Welfare

6

SUBTITLE 3 – ANIMAL PROTECTION AND HUMANE CARE

7

1 § 12-3-301. CRUELTY; PROHIBITED ACTS.

2 (A) THIS SECTION DOES NOT APPLY TO CUSTOMARY AND NORMAL
3 VETERINARY AND ANIMAL HUSBANDRY PRACTICES, INCLUDING:

- 4 (1) DEHORNING;
- 5 (2) CASTRATION;
- 6 (3) DOCKING; AND
- 7 (4) LIMITED FEEDING FOR DIET PURPOSES.

8 (B) A PERSON MAY NOT:

- 9 (1) BEAT, CRUELLY TREAT, TORMENT, OVERLOAD, OVERWORK, OR
10 OTHERWISE ABUSE AN ANIMAL; OR
- 11 (2) CAUSE, INSTIGATE, OR ALLOW A DOGFIGHT, COCKFIGHT,
12 BULLFIGHT, CALF ROPING, OR OTHER COMBAT BETWEEN ANIMALS OR
13 BETWEEN AN ANIMAL AND A HUMAN.

14 (C) (1) THIS SUBSECTION DOES NOT APPLY TO:

- 15 (I) A FERAL CAT CAREGIVER WHO RETURNS A FERAL CAT TO
16 THE LOCATION WHERE IT WAS ORIGINALLY TRAPPED; OR
- 17 (II) AN ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER WHO RETURNS A FERAL
18 CAT TO A LOCATION DEEMED SUITABLE BY THE HEALTH OFFICER OR THEIR
19 DESIGNEE.

20 (2) A PERSON MAY NOT ABANDON AN ANIMAL ON PUBLIC OR
21 PRIVATE PROPERTY.

22 (D) A PERSON MAY NOT SELL OR OFFER FOR SALE:

- 23 (1) A RABBIT THAT IS LESS THAN 8 WEEKS OLD; OR

1 (2) EXCEPT AS PROVIDED BY STATE LAW, A PUPPY OR KITTEN THAT
2 IS LESS THAN 8 WEEKS OLD.

3
4 § 12-3-302. HUMANE CARE.

5 (A) (1) (I) IN THIS SECTION, “SUITABLE SHELTER” MEANS A
6 STRUCTURE THAT HAS A FLOOR, A ROOF, AND FOUR WALLS, ONE OF WHICH
7 MUST CONTAIN A DOORWAY.

8 (II) “SUITABLE SHELTER” DOES NOT INCLUDE:

9 1. A CRAWL SPACE UNDER OR INSIDE OF A BUILDING
10 OR PART OF A BUILDING;

11 2. A SPACE UNDER OR INSIDE OF A VEHICLE;

12 3. A STRUCTURE MADE FROM PRESSURE-TREATED
13 WOOD WHICH CONTAINS THE CHEMICALS ARSENIC OR CHROMIUM;

14 4. A STRUCTURE WITH A FLOOR CONSISTING OF WIRE
15 OR CHAIN-LINK; OR

16 5. A STRUCTURE MADE FROM CARDBOARD OR OTHER
17 MATERIALS THAT ARE EASILY DEGRADED BY THE ELEMENTS.

18 (B) AN OWNER OF AN ANIMAL SHALL ENSURE THE ANIMAL IS TREATED
19 WITH HUMANE CARE AND MEETS ALL CRITERIA OF THIS ARTICLE.

20 (C) (1) UNLESS AN ANIMAL HAS CONTINUOUS ACCESS TO SUITABLE
21 SHELTER, AN OWNED ANIMAL SHALL BE BROUGHT INSIDE A HOME OR
22 BUILDING WITHIN 30 MINUTES OF THE ONSET OF AND DURING ADVERSE
23 ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS.

1 (2) THE OWNER OF AN ANIMAL THAT IS NOT KEPT WITHIN A HOME
2 OR BUILDING SHALL PROVIDE THE ANIMAL WITH A SUITABLE SHELTER TO
3 PROTECT THE ANIMAL FROM WIND, SNOW, RAIN, COLD, SUNLIGHT, AND
4 ADVERSE ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS.

5 (3) THE SPACE AVAILABLE TO THE ANIMAL IN THE SUITABLE
6 SHELTER SHALL:

7 (I) BE MAINTAINED IN A SAFE, SANITARY, AND HEALTHFUL
8 MANNER;

9 (II) BE FREE OF STANDING WATER AND ACCUMULATED
10 WASTE AND DEBRIS;

11 (III) BE PROTECTED FROM FLOODING;

12 (IV) HAVE ADEQUATE VENTILATION TO ALLOW THE ANIMAL
13 TO REMAIN DRY AND MAINTAIN A NORMAL BODY TEMPERATURE; AND

14 (V) HAVE EXPOSURE TO NATURAL OR ARTIFICIAL LIGHT.

15 (4) THE SUITABLE SHELTER PROVIDED TO AN ANIMAL SHALL BE
16 SUITABLE FOR THE ANIMAL'S SPECIES, AGE, CONDITION, SIZE, AND TYPE.

17 (D) (1) IN THE AREA PROVIDED TO AN ANIMAL, WHETHER INDOORS OR
18 OUTDOORS, AN OWNER SHALL:

19 (I) PROVIDE ACCESS TO SUFFICIENT FOOD, POTABLE WATER,
20 AND APPROPRIATE SHELTER;

21 (II) PROVIDE SUFFICIENT SPACE FOR THE ANIMAL TO STAND
22 TO THE ANIMAL'S FULL HEIGHT, STRETCH OUT, TURN AROUND, LIE DOWN, AND
23 MAKE NORMAL POSTURAL ADJUSTMENTS COMFORTABLY;

1 (III) IF OUTDOORS, PROVIDE SUITABLE SHADE; AND

2 (IV) COMPLY WITH ALL OTHER PROVISIONS IN THIS TITLE.

3 (2) AN OWNER MAY NOT CONFINED AN ANIMAL IN UNSAFE OR
4 UNSANITARY CONDITIONS FOR ANY PERIOD OF TIME.

5 (3) IF AN AREA OF CONFINEMENT IS USED FOR EXTENDED PERIODS
6 OF TIME OR SERVES AS AN ANIMAL'S PRIMARY ENCLOSURE, THE OWNER SHALL
7 PROVIDE AN AREA OF AN ADEQUATE SIZE TO PROVIDE THE ANIMAL WITH
8 SUFFICIENT SPACE TO EXPRESS NORMAL BEHAVIORS AND EXERCISE FREEDOM
9 OF MOVEMENT AS NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN GOOD PHYSICAL CONDITION.

10
11 § 12-3-303. VETERINARY CARE REQUIRED.

12 (A) THE OWNER OF AN ANIMAL SHALL PROVIDE ADEQUATE VETERINARY
13 CARE TO PREVENT SUFFERING AND TO MAINTAIN THE HEALTH OF THE ANIMAL.

14 (B) AN ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER MAY DIRECT AN OWNER OR FERAL
15 CAT CAREGIVER TO PROVIDE:

16 (1) VETERINARY EXAMINATION AND TREATMENT; AND

17 (2) REMEDIES TO ABATE CONDITIONS THAT ADVERSELY AFFECT
18 THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF THE ANIMAL INCLUDING:

19 (I) PROTECTION FROM THE ELEMENTS;

20 (II) PROTECTION FROM HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS;

21 (III) REQUIREMENTS TO UTILIZE ONLY APPROPRIATE
22 METHODS OF RESTRAINT OR CONFINEMENT;

1 (IV) REQUIREMENTS TO PROVIDE WHOLESOME FOOD AND
2 POTABLE WATER; AND

3 (V) REQUIREMENTS TO PROVIDE SANITARY CONDITIONS.
4

5 § 12-3-304. TETHERS AND LEASHES.

6 (A) (1) AN OWNER MAY NOT TETHER AN ANIMAL OUTSIDE UNDER
7 UNSAFE CONDITIONS, INCLUDING EXTREME WEATHER CONDITIONS THAT MAY
8 ENDANGER THE HEALTH, SAFETY, OR WELFARE OF THE ANIMAL.

9 (2) A TETHER SHALL BE PROPERLY POSITIONED TO:

10 (I) PREVENT TANGLING, INCLUDING TANGLING IN OR
11 AROUND OBJECTS; AND

12 (II) ALLOW CONTINUOUS ACCESS TO APPROPRIATE SHADE,
13 SHELTER, AND WATER.

14 (3) A TETHER MAY NOT UNREASONABLY LIMIT THE MOVEMENT OF
15 THE ANIMAL.

16 (B) (1) THE OWNER OF AN ANIMAL THAT IS ATTACHED TO A CHAIN,
17 ROPE, OR LEASH TETHER SHALL PROVIDE A SWIVEL DEVICE AT EACH END OF
18 THE CHAIN, ROPE, OR LEASH TETHER TO PREVENT CHOKING.

19 (2) THE MATERIAL OF A TETHER SHALL BE CONSTRUCTED OF AN
20 APPROPRIATE MATERIAL FOR THE ANIMAL'S SPECIES, AGE, CONDITION, SIZE,
21 AND TYPE AND PREVENT UNNECESSARY STRAIN ON THE ANIMAL.

22 (C) (1) EXCEPT AS PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH (2) OF THIS SUBSECTION, A
23 COLLAR WORN BY AN ANIMAL SHALL BE LEATHER, NYLON, OR PLASTIC.

1 (2) (I) AN ANIMAL MAY ONLY WEAR A METAL COLLAR, SUCH AS
2 A CHAIN OR PRONGED COLLAR, AS A TRAINING COLLAR DURING OBEDIENCE
3 TRAINING.

4 (II) THE OWNER SHALL REMOVE THE METAL COLLAR FROM
5 THE ANIMAL AFTER THE OBEDIENCE TRAINING HAS BEEN COMPLETED.

6
7 § 12-3-305. RECKLESS ANIMAL OWNER.

8 (A) SUBJECT TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF SUBSECTION (B) OF THIS
9 SECTION, AN OWNER WHO IS FOUND IN VIOLATION OF THE PROVISIONS OF THIS
10 ARTICLE TWO OR MORE TIMES FROM SEPARATE INCIDENTS WITHIN A
11 PRECEDING 24-MONTH PERIOD MAY BE DESIGNATED BY THE HEALTH OFFICER
12 AS A RECKLESS ANIMAL OWNER.

13 (B) AN OWNER MAY ONLY BE CONSIDERED A RECKLESS ANIMAL OWNER
14 IF THE OWNER:

15 (1) IS BROUGHT BEFORE THE ANIMAL HEARING BOARD FOR
16 VIOLATIONS OF THIS ARTICLE AND THE BOARD UPHOLDS THE VIOLATIONS;

17 (2) IS FOUND GUILTY BY A COURT OF LAW OR IS PLACED ON
18 PROBATION BEFORE JUDGMENT FOR AN ANIMAL RELATED OFFENSE;

19 (3) PAYS A CIVIL FINE FOR A VIOLATION OF THIS ARTICLE; OR

20 (4) OWNS AN ANIMAL DESIGNATED AS MENACING, POTENTIALLY
21 DANGEROUS, OR DANGEROUS WITHIN THE PRECEDING 24 MONTHS.

1 (C) UPON DESIGNATION BY THE HEALTH OFFICER THAT AN INDIVIDUAL IS
2 A RECKLESS ANIMAL OWNER, THE DIVISION SHALL ISSUE A WRITTEN NOTICE TO
3 THE OWNER THAT INCLUDES:

4 (1) THE NAME AND ADDRESS OF THE RECKLESS ANIMAL OWNER;

5 (2) A DESCRIPTION OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LED TO THE
6 DESIGNATION;

7 (3) THE NAME, DESCRIPTION, AND LICENSE NUMBER, IF ANY, OF
8 ANY ANIMALS OWNED BY OR IN THE CUSTODY OF THE RECKLESS ANIMAL
9 OWNER; AND

10 (4) NOTICE OF THE RIGHT TO APPEAL THE DESIGNATION.

11 (D) A PERSON DESIGNATED AS A RECKLESS ANIMAL OWNER MAY APPEAL
12 THE DESIGNATION BY FILING A WRITTEN NOTICE OF APPEAL WITHIN 5 DAYS OF
13 SERVICE OF THE RECKLESS ANIMAL OWNER NOTICE.

14 (E) (1) THE HEARING BEFORE THE ANIMAL HEARING BOARD SHALL BE
15 GOVERNED BY § 12-8-105 OF THE CODE.

16 (2) THE DIVISION SHALL ESTABLISH A VIOLATION OF THIS SECTION
17 BY A PREPONDERANCE OF THE EVIDENCE.

18 (3) IF THE OWNER WHO APPEALS FAILS TO APPEAR AT THE
19 HEARING, THE APPEAL SHALL BE DISMISSED BY THE BOARD.

20 (F) (1) AN OWNER DESIGNATED AS A RECKLESS ANIMAL OWNER MAY
21 NOT OWN, KEEP, POSSESS, OR HARBOR ANY ANIMAL FOR 4 YEARS FROM THE
22 DATE OF THE DESIGNATION.

1 (2) ALL LICENSES ISSUED UNDER TITLE 2 OF THIS ARTICLE TO THE
2 RECKLESS ANIMAL OWNER SHALL BE REVOKED BY THE DIVISION.

3 (3) ALL ANIMALS OWNED OR IN THE CUSTODY OF THE RECKLESS
4 ANIMAL OWNER SHALL BE:

5 (I) IMPOUNDED AND SEIZED BY THE DIVISION; AND

6 (II) BE IMMEDIATELY CONSIDERED UNWANTED OR
7 UNREDEEMED.

8

9 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, that this Act, having been passed by
10 the affirmative vote of five members of the County Council, shall take effect 14 days after its
11 enactment.