

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

Bill No. 31-26

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 – Public Safety – Designations

FOR the purpose of establishing designations for menacing and potentially dangerous animals; renaming the “Dangerous Animals” title as “Public Safety”; establishing certain civil penalties, waivers of penalties, and appeals under certain circumstances; defining certain terms; and generally relating to animals and public safety.

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments

Article 12 – Animals

Section 12-8-101, 12-8-102, 12-8-103 through 12-8-106 to be under the amended title
“Title 8. Public Safety”

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.

BY adding

Article 12 – Animals
Sections 12-8-103 through 12-8-105 and 12-8-110 to be under the amended title “Title 8.
Public Safety”
Baltimore County Code, 2015

BY repealing

Article 12 – Animals
Section 12-8-107
Baltimore County Code, 2015

Preamble

WHEREAS, Baltimore County has adopted provisions to address public safety issues posed by menacing and dangerous animals; and

WHEREAS, this legislation brings the designations of “menacing” and “dangerous” into the same title, renamed as “Public Safety”; and

WHEREAS, the menacing animal designation primarily applies to animals who have attacked other animals, making owners subject to a \$250 fine; and

WHEREAS, the dangerous animal designation primarily applies to animals who have attacked or injured other animals or humans, and are subject to impoundment; and

WHEREAS, this legislation creates an intermediate step for animals who have attacked a human or another animal, without provocation, making owners subject to a \$500 fine; and

WHEREAS, this legislation adopts the Dunbar Bite Scale in order to provide an objective measure of dog attacks on humans or other animals; and

WHEREAS, this legislation provides Baltimore County Animal Services with additional enforcement tools and flexibility to ensure the safety of both animals and humans; 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 8 – [Dangerous Animals] PUBLIC SAFETY

6
7 § 12-8-101. Definitions.

8 (a) In this title the following words have the meanings indicated.

9 (b) “Board” means the Animal Hearing Board.

10 (c) (1) “Dangerous animal” means an animal that has been declared by the Health
11 Officer as posing a threat to the public health or safety THAT MEETS THE CRITERIA IN § 12-
12 8-102 OF THIS TITLE.

13 (2) “Dangerous animal” does not include an animal owned by and working for a
14 governmental or law enforcement agency.

15 (D) “DUNBAR BITE SCALE” MEANS THE OBJECTIVE EVALUATION TOOL
16 USED TO DETERMINE THE SEVERITY OF A DOG BITE THAT CONTAINS THE
17 FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

18 (1) LEVEL 1: FEARFUL, AGGRESSIVE, OR OUT-OF-CONTROL
19 BEHAVIOR BUT NO SKIN-CONTACT BY TEETH;

20 (2) LEVEL 2: SKIN-CONTACT BY TEETH BUT NO SKIN-PUNCTURE;

21 (3) LEVEL 3: ONE TO FOUR PUNCTURES FROM A SINGLE BITE WITH
22 NO PUNCTURE DEEPER THAN HALF THE LENGTH OF THE DOG’S CANINE TEETH;

23 (4) LEVEL 4: ONE TO FOUR PUNCTURES FROM A SINGLE BITE;

1 (5) LEVEL 5: MULTIPLE-BITE INCIDENT WITH AT LEAST TWO LEVEL
2 4 BITES OR MULTIPLE-ATTACK INCIDENT WITH AT LEAST ONE LEVEL 4 BITE IN
3 EACH; AND

4 (6) LEVEL 6: FATAL ATTACK ON A HUMAN OR ANOTHER ANIMAL.

5 (E) (1) "MENACING ANIMAL" MEANS AN ANIMAL THAT HAS BEEN
6 DECLARED BY THE HEALTH OFFICER AS POSING A THREAT TO THE PUBLIC
7 HEALTH OR SAFETY THAT MEETS THE CRITERIA IN § 12-8-103 OF THIS TITLE.

8 (2) "MENACING ANIMAL" DOES NOT INCLUDE AN ANIMAL OWNED
9 BY AND WORKING FOR A GOVERNMENTAL OR LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY.

10 [(d)] (F) (1) (i) "Owner" means a person who possesses, has custody of, exercises
11 control over, or has a property right in any animal.

12 (ii) "Owner" includes a minor's parent or guardian, if the minor owns the
13 animal.

14 (2) "Owner" does not include:

15 (i) A veterinary hospital;

16 (ii) A commercial kennel; or

17 (iii) A commercial stable.

18 (G) (1) "POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANIMAL" MEANS AN ANIMAL THAT
19 HAS BEEN DECLARED BY THE HEALTH OFFICER AS POTENTIALLY POSING A
20 THREAT TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH OR SAFETY THAT MEETS THE CRITERIA IN § 12-
21 8-104 OF THIS TITLE.

1 (2) "POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS" DOES NOT INCLUDE AN ANIMAL
2 OWNED BY AND WORKING FOR A GOVERNMENTAL OR LAW ENFORCEMENT
3 AGENCY.

4
5 §12-8-102. Dangerous animals.

6 (a) An animal poses a threat to the public health or safety if the animal:

7 (1) Attacks or injures a person or a domestic animal;

8 (2) Exhibits aggressive or dangerous behavior and is not adequately confined or
9 restrained;

10 (3) Is known or suspected to be an animal exposed to rabies and is not adequately
11 confined or restrained; or

12 (4) Has been subject to confinement or restraint orders from the Health Officer or
13 the [Animal Hearing] Board and those orders have not been followed.

14 (b) (1) The Health Officer may declare an animal a dangerous animal if the animal
15 poses a threat to the public health or safety.

16 (2) The declaration shall be based on:

17 (i) Personal observation;

18 (ii) Observations of animal control officers;

19 (iii) The affidavits of individuals concerning the individual's personal
20 experience with the animal;

21 (iv) Bite contact or non-bite contact reports made to the Baltimore County
22 Police, the Health Officer, or the [Animal Services] Division;

23 (v) Animal control records; or

1 (vi) Other documented information.

2 (3) THE DUNBAR BITE SCALE MAY BE USED TO INFORM THE
3 HEALTH OFFICER'S DECLARATION OF A DOG AS DANGEROUS, WITH LEVELS 4, 5,
4 AND 6 USED AS JUSTIFICATION.

5 [(c) (1) Within 10 days after declaring an animal a dangerous animal, the Health
6 Officer shall notify the owner of the declaration.

7 (2) The notification shall indicate that the owner may appeal the decision of the
8 Health Officer.]

9 [(d)] (C) Disposition; notification; conditions.

10 (1) If an animal is declared a dangerous animal, the Health Officer may:

11 [(i) 1. Impound the animal;

12 2. Order the owner to surrender the animal to the Animal Services
13 Division or the Baltimore County Police Department; or

14 3. Release the animal to the custody of the owner; and

15 (ii) Order the animal spayed or neutered, if the animal is not already
16 spayed or neutered.]

17 (I) IMPOUND THE ANIMAL;

18 (II) ORDER THE OWNER TO SURRENDER THE ANIMAL TO THE
19 DIVISION; OR

20 (III) RELEASE THE ANIMAL TO THE CUSTODY OF THE OWNER.

21 (2) IF THE HEALTH OFFICER RELEASES THE ANIMAL TO THE
22 CUSTODY OF THE OWNER, THE HEALTH OFFICER MAY ORDER THE ANIMAL:

1 (I) SPAYED OR NEUTERED, IF THE ANIMAL IS NOT ALREADY
2 SPAYED OR NEUTERED; AND

3 (II) MICROCHIPPED, IF THE ANIMAL IS NOT ALREADY
4 MICROCHIPPED.

5 [(2)] (3) If the animal is impounded, the Health Officer shall make a prompt and
6 reasonable effort to notify the owner of the impoundment and the reasons for the impoundment.

7 [(3)] (4) If the animal is released to the custody of the owner, the Health Officer
8 may order any measures necessary to confine or restrain the animal pending the hearing of the
9 Board.

10 [(e) (1) Within 5 days after the notice under subsection (d) of this section, subject to
11 Title 1, Subtitle 2 of this article, an owner may appeal the decision of the Health Officer by filing
12 a petition with the Animal Services Division requesting a hearing before the Board.

13 (2) The Animal Services Division shall notify the owner of the date of the
14 hearing at the Board.]

15 (D) (1) IF AN ANIMAL IS DECLARED A DANGEROUS ANIMAL, THE
16 HEALTH OFFICER SHALL ISSUE A CIVIL CITATION TO THE OWNER DECLARING
17 THE ANIMAL A DANGEROUS ANIMAL.

18 (2) THE CIVIL CITATION SHALL IMPOSE A CIVIL MONETARY
19 PENALTY OF UP TO \$1,000.

20 (E) IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF § 12-1-110 OF THIS
21 ARTICLE, THE OWNER OF THE MENACING ANIMAL SHALL:

22 (1) PAY THE CIVIL MONETARY PENALTY; OR

1 (2) MAY REQUEST A HEARING BEFORE THE BOARD, AS PROVIDED IN
2 THIS SUBTITLE.

3
4 § 12-8-103. MENACING ANIMALS.

5 (A) AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO DECLARING AN ANIMAL A DANGEROUS
6 ANIMAL, THE HEALTH OFFICER MAY DECLARE AN ANIMAL A MENACING
7 ANIMAL IF THE ANIMAL:

8 (1) ATTACKS OR INJURES A DOMESTIC ANIMAL; OR

9 (2) EXHIBITS AGGRESSIVE OR DANGEROUS BEHAVIOR AND IS NOT
10 ADEQUATELY CONFINED OR RESTRAINED.

11 (B) (1) THE DECLARATION SHALL BE BASED ON:

12 (I) PERSONAL OBSERVATION;

13 (II) OBSERVATIONS OF ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICERS;

14 (III) AFFIDAVITS CONCERNING AN INDIVIDUAL'S PERSONAL
15 EXPERIENCE WITH THE ANIMAL;

16 (IV) ANIMAL CONTROL RECORDS; OR

17 (V) OTHER DOCUMENTED INFORMATION.

18 (2) THE DUNBAR BITE SCALE MAY BE USED TO INFORM THE
19 HEALTH OFFICER'S DECLARATION OF A DOG AS A MENACING ANIMAL, WITH
20 LEVELS 1 AND 2 USED AS JUSTIFICATION.

21 (C) (1) IF AN ANIMAL IS DECLARED A MENACING ANIMAL, THE HEALTH
22 OFFICER SHALL ISSUE A CIVIL CITATION TO THE OWNER DECLARING THE
23 ANIMAL A MENACING ANIMAL.

1 (2) THE CIVIL CITATION SHALL IMPOSE A CIVIL MONETARY
2 PENALTY OF UP TO \$250.

3 (D) IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF § 12-1-110 OF THIS
4 ARTICLE, THE OWNER OF THE MENACING ANIMAL:

5 (1) SHALL PAY THE CIVIL MONETARY PENALTY; OR

6 (2) MAY REQUEST A HEARING BEFORE THE BOARD, AS PROVIDED IN
7 THIS TITLE.

8
9 § 12-8-104. POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANIMALS.

10 (A) *CRITERIA*. POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANIMAL MEANS AN ANIMAL
11 THAT:

12 (1) HAS BITTEN OR ATTACKED AN INDIVIDUAL OR ANOTHER
13 ANIMAL WITHOUT PROVOCATION;

14 (2) EXHIBITS AGGRESSIVE OR DANGEROUS BEHAVIOR AND IS NOT
15 ADEQUATELY CONFINED OR RESTRAINED;

16 (3) IS KNOWN OR SUSPECTED TO BE AN ANIMAL EXPOSED TO
17 RABIES AND IS NOT ADEQUATELY CONFINED OR RESTRAINED; OR

18 (4) REQUIRES CONFINEMENT OR RESTRAINTS TO PROTECT THE
19 HEALTH, SAFETY, OR WELFARE OF THE PUBLIC.

20 (B) *BASIS FOR DECLARATION*.

21 (1) THE DECLARATION SHALL BE BASED ON:

22 (I) PERSONAL OBSERVATION;

23 (II) OBSERVATIONS OF ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICERS;

1 (III) AFFIDAVITS CONCERNING AN INDIVIDUAL'S PERSONAL
2 EXPERIENCE WITH THE ANIMAL;

3 (IV) ANIMAL CONTROL RECORDS; OR

4 (V) OTHER DOCUMENTED INFORMATION.

5 (2) THE DUNBAR BITE SCALE MAY BE USED TO INFORM THE
6 HEALTH OFFICER'S DECLARATION OF A DOG AS POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS,
7 WITH LEVELS 2 THROUGH 4 USED AS JUSTIFICATION.

8 (C) IF AN ANIMAL IS DECLARED A POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANIMAL,
9 THE HEALTH OFFICER SHALL:

10 (1) ISSUE A CIVIL CITATION TO THE OWNER DECLARING THE
11 ANIMAL A POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANIMAL; AND

12 (2) NOTIFY THE OWNER OF REQUIRED ACTIONS, INCLUDING:

13 (I) CONFINEMENT MEASURES;

14 (II) SPAYING AND NEUTERING OF THE ANIMAL; AND

15 (III) MICROCHIPPING, TO BE IMPLEMENTED AS CONSIDERED
16 APPROPRIATE BY THE DIVISION.

17 (D) THE CITATION SHALL IMPOSE A CIVIL MONETARY PENALTY OF UP TO
18 \$500.

19 (E) (1) IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 12-1-110 OF THIS ARTICLE, THE OWNER
20 OF THE POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANIMAL:

21 (I) SHALL PAY THE CIVIL MONETARY PENALTY AND COMPLY
22 WITH CONFINEMENT MEASURES ORDERED; OR

1 (II) MAY REQUEST A HEARING BEFORE THE BOARD, AS
2 PROVIDED IN THIS TITLE.

3
4 § 12-8-105. NOTIFICATION OF DECLARATION.

5 (A) WITHIN 10 DAYS AFTER DECLARING AN ANIMAL A DANGEROUS
6 ANIMAL, A MENACING ANIMAL, OR A POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANIMAL, THE
7 HEALTH OFFICER SHALL NOTIFY THE OWNER OF THE DECLARATION.

8 (B) THE NOTIFICATION SHALL INDICATE THAT THE OWNER MAY APPEAL
9 THE DECISION OF THE HEALTH OFFICER AS PROVIDED IN § 12-8-106 OF THIS
10 TITLE.

11
12 § [12-8-103.] 12-8-106. APPEALS – Hearings.

13 (a) (1) WITHIN 5 DAYS AFTER A NOTICE TO AN OWNER UNDER THIS
14 SUBTITLE AND SUBJECT TO TITLE 1, SUBTITLE 2 OF THIS ARTICLE, AN OWNER
15 MAY APPEAL THE DECISION OF THE HEALTH OFFICER BY FILING A PETITION
16 WITH THE DIVISION REQUESTING A HEARING BEFORE THE BOARD.

17 (2) THE DIVISION SHALL NOTIFY THE OWNER OF THE DATE OF THE
18 HEARING AT THE BOARD.

19 (B) If the owner requests a hearing, within 25 days after the Health Officer has declared
20 an animal to be a dangerous animal, A MENACING ANIMAL, OR A POTENTIALLY
21 DANGEROUS ANIMAL, the Board shall conduct a hearing concerning the declaration.

22 [(b)] (C) (1) An owner may request, in writing, a postponement of the hearing.

23 (2) An owner may only request one postponement of the hearing.

1 [(c)] (D) (1) The Board may:

2 (i) Affirm or reverse a declaration that an animal is a dangerous animal, A
3 MENACING ANIMAL, OR A POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANIMAL; and

4 (ii) Affirm, reverse, or modify the decision of the Health Officer on the
5 disposition of the animal under § 12-8-102(C)[(d)] of this title.

6 (2) The Board may order:

7 (i) Any measures necessary to confine or restrain the animal and a
8 schedule for the implementation of those measures;

9 (ii) The owner to comply with any state or local requirements including
10 rabies vaccination and licensing;

11 (iii) The owner to pay any fees for impoundment, boarding, vaccinations,
12 licensing, and veterinary services or any other civil monetary penalties incurred under this
13 article;

14 (iv) The owner to display clearly visible signs on the owner's property
15 that a dangerous animal is on the property;

16 (v) The animal to be spayed or neutered;

17 (vi) The animal to be removed from the county;

18 (vii) The animal to be euthanized; [or]

19 (viii) THE ANIMAL TO BE MICROCHIPPED; OR

20 (IX) The animal to be impounded until:

21 1. The orders of the Board are implemented to the satisfaction of
22 the Health Officer; and

23 2. The owner pays any fees or civil monetary penalties.

1 [(d)] (E) The Board shall notify the owner of the Board’s decision.

2 [(e)] (F) The Health Officer, the [Animal Services] Division, and the Board are not
3 responsible for the cost of any orders of the Board.

4 [(f)] (G) An owner shall be considered to have waived any property interest or claim of
5 ownership the owner has in an impounded animal if the owner fails to attend a hearing for which
6 the owner did not otherwise request and receive a postponement.

7 [(g)] (H) An impounded animal shall be deemed abandoned and shall be disposed of in
8 accordance with this article if:

9 (1) The owner waives ownership in accordance with this section;

10 (2) Does not pay the boarding fees as required under Title 1, Subtitle 2 of this
11 article; or

12 (3) The owner does not comply with the orders of the Board.

13
14 § [12-8-104] 12-8-107. Appeal to the Board of Appeals.

15 (a) Subject to Title 1, Subtitle 2 of this article, within 10 days after the decision or order
16 of the Board, any owner who is aggrieved by the decision or order of the Board may appeal the
17 decision or order to the Board of Appeals.

18 (b) The Board OF APPEALS shall determine the appeal as provided in § 12-1-114(f)-(h)
19 of this article.

20
21 § [12-8-105] 12-8-108. Right of entry.

22 (a) The Health Officer, an Animal Control Officer, or a Baltimore County police officer
23 may enter private property to impound an animal in accordance with this title.

1 (b) The Health Officer or an animal control officer may enter private property to:

2 (1) Inspect the confinement or restraint of a dangerous animal; and

3 (2) Check compliance with the orders of the Board.

4
5 § [12-8-106] 12-8-109. Notification and transfer of animal.

6 (a) The owner of a dangerous animal shall notify the [Animal Services] Division:

7 (1) Any time the animal is not under the restraint or confinement requirements
8 ordered under this title; and

9 (2) Immediately on transfer of the animal to another owner, of the name and
10 address of the subsequent owner.

11 (b) If the owner of a dangerous animal transfers the animal to another owner or to a
12 humane animal shelter, the owner shall notify the subsequent owner:

13 (1) That the animal has been declared a dangerous animal;

14 (2) Of the specifics of the animal's dangerous behavior; and

15 (3) Of any orders of the Board for the animal.

16 (c) The Health Officer shall make reasonable efforts to notify the appropriate agency of
17 another jurisdiction of:

18 (1) A transfer of a dangerous animal into that jurisdiction; and

19 (2) Any measures ordered by the supervisor or the Board concerning the animal.

20
21 [§ 12-8-107. Civil penalties and fees.

22 (a) (1) Notwithstanding any other provision of this article, the Health Officer shall
23 issue a civil citation to the owner after declaring an animal a dangerous animal.

1 (2) The civil citation shall impose a civil monetary penalty not exceeding \$1,000.

2 (b) The Board may waive or reduce the civil monetary penalty if the owner:

3 (1) Has complied with the orders of the Board;

4 (2) Surrenders the animal to the Animal Services Division for euthanasia; or

5 (3) Agrees in writing to euthanasia if the animal is impounded.

6 (c) Subject to Title 1, Subtitle 2 of this article, the Health Officer may assess fees for
7 impoundment, boarding, vaccination, or veterinary services provided to an animal under this
8 title.]

9
10 § 12-8-110. PENALTIES AND FEES.

11 (A) THE BOARD MAY WAIVE OR REDUCE THE CIVIL MONETARY PENALTY
12 ISSUED UNDER THIS SUBTITLE IF THE OWNER:

13 (1) HAS COMPLIED WITH THE ORDERS OF THE BOARD;

14 (2) SURRENDERS THE ANIMAL TO THE DIVISION FOR EUTHANASIA;

15 OR

16 (3) PROVIDED THE ANIMAL IS IMPOUNDED, AGREES IN WRITING TO
17 EUTHANASIA.

18 (B) SUBJECT TO TITLE 1, SUBTITLE 2 OF THIS ARTICLE, THE HEALTH
19 OFFICER MAY ASSESS AN OWNER FEES FOR THE FOLLOWING SERVICES
20 PROVIDED TO AN ANIMAL UNDER THIS TITLE:

21 (1) IMPOUNDMENT;

22 (2) BOARDING;

23 (3) VACCINATION;

- 1 (4) SPAYING OR NEUTERING;
- 2 (5) VETERINARY SERVICES; AND
- 3 (6) ANY OTHER NEEDED SERVICE.

4

5 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, that this Act, having been passed by

6 the affirmative vote of five members of the County Council, shall take effect 14 days after its

7 enactment.