

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
&
All Councilmembers

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 and amending the scope and exemptions for Article 12;
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 repealing and reenacting, with amendments

Section 12-1-102
Article 12 – Animals
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 12-3-301, 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

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

1 ARTICLE 12 – ANIMALS

2 Title 1 – In General

3 Subtitle 1 – In General

4
5 § 12-1-102. Scope and Exemption.

6 (a) Except as provided in [subsection (b) of] this section, this article applies to a person
7 who owns, leases, harbors, shelters, or controls an animal in the county, whether the person is a
8 resident of the county or not.

9 (b) AGRICULTURE EXEMPTION.

10 (1) (I) In this subsection, “farm animal” means [an animal being maintained
11 for the production of food, food products, and fiber] ANY DOMESTICATED ANIMAL KEPT
12 ON A FARM SETTING FOR AGRICULTURAL PURPOSES, INCLUDING FOOD, FIBER,
13 LABOR, BREEDING, PERFORMANCE, RESEARCH, OR AGRICULTURAL TOURISM.

14 (II) “FARM ANIMAL” INCLUDES HORSES, MULES, DONKEYS,
15 CATTLE, BISON, SWINE, SHEEP, GOATS, POULTRY, RABBITS, ALPACAS, LLAMAS,
16 AND OTHER ANIMALS UNDER A PERSON’S CARE IN AN AGRICULTURAL SETTING.

17 (III) “FARM ANIMAL” DOES NOT INCLUDE ANIMALS KEPT
18 SOLELY FOR PLEASURE.

19 (2) This article does not apply to farm animals, except as provided in §§ [12-3-
20 103] 12-3-301 and 12-3-208 of this Article regarding cruelty to animals.

21 (C) PUBLIC SAFETY EXEMPTION. THIS ARTICLE DOES NOT APPLY TO:

22 (1) AN ANIMAL OWNED BY OR WORKING FOR A GOVERNMENTAL
23 OR LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY; OR

1 (II) AN ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER WHO RETURNS A FERAL
2 CAT TO A LOCATION DEEMED SUITABLE BY THE HEALTH OFFICER OR THEIR
3 DESIGNEE.

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

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

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

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

10
11 § 12-3-302. HUMANE CARE.

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

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

16 1. A CRAWL SPACE UNDER OR INSIDE OF A BUILDING
17 OR PART OF A BUILDING;

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

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

21 4. A STRUCTURE WITH A FLOOR CONSISTING OF WIRE
22 OR CHAIN-LINK; OR

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

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

5 (I) PROVIDE ACCESS TO SUFFICIENT FOOD, POTABLE WATER,
6 AND APPROPRIATE SHELTER;

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

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

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

12 (2) AN OWNER MAY NOT CONFINE AN ANIMAL IN UNSAFE OR
13 UNSANITARY CONDITIONS FOR ANY PERIOD OF TIME.

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

19
20 § 12-3-303. VETERINARY CARE REQUIRED.

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

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

3 (1) VETERINARY EXAMINATION AND TREATMENT; AND

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

6 (I) PROTECTION FROM THE ELEMENTS;

7 (II) PROTECTION FROM HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS;

8 (III) REQUIREMENTS TO UTILIZE ONLY APPROPRIATE
9 METHODS OF RESTRAINT OR CONFINEMENT;

10 (IV) REQUIREMENTS TO PROVIDE WHOLESOME FOOD AND
11 POTABLE WATER; AND

12 (V) REQUIREMENTS TO PROVIDE SANITARY CONDITIONS.

13
14 § 12-3-304. TETHERS AND LEASHES.

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

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

19 (I) PREVENT TANGLING, INCLUDING TANGLING IN OR
20 AROUND OBJECTS; AND

21 (II) ALLOW CONTINUOUS ACCESS TO APPROPRIATE SHADE,
22 SHELTER, AND WATER.

1 (3) A TETHER MAY NOT UNREASONABLY LIMIT THE MOVEMENT OF
2 THE ANIMAL.

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

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

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

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

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

16

17 § 12-3-305. RECKLESS ANIMAL OWNER.

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

1 (B) AN OWNER MAY ONLY BE CONSIDERED A RECKLESS ANIMAL OWNER
2 IF THE OWNER:

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

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

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

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

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

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

14 (2) A DESCRIPTION OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LED TO THE
15 DESIGNATION;

16 (3) THE NAME, DESCRIPTION, AND LICENSE NUMBER, IF ANY, OF
17 ANY ANIMALS OWNED BY OR IN THE CUSTODY OF THE RECKLESS ANIMAL
18 OWNER; AND

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

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

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

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

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

7 (F) (1) AN OWNER DESIGNATED AS A RECKLESS ANIMAL OWNER MAY
8 NOT OWN, KEEP, POSSESS, RESIDE WITH, OR HARBOR ANY ANIMAL FOR 4 YEARS
9 FROM THE DATE OF THE DESIGNATION.

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

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

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

15 (II) BE IMMEDIATELY CONSIDERED UNWANTED OR
16 UNREDEEMED.

17
18 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, that this Act, having been passed by
19 the affirmative vote of five members of the County Council, shall take effect 14 days after its
20 enactment.



LEGISLATION DETAIL

LEGISLATION _____

DISPOSITION _____

ENACTED _____

EFFECTIVE _____

AMENDMENTS _____

ROLL CALL - BILL

MOTION

AYE NAY

SECOND

Councilman Young

Councilman Patoka

Councilman Kach

Councilman Jones

Councilman Marks

Councilman Ertel

Councilman Crandell

ROLL CALL - AMENDMENTS

MOTION

AYE NAY

SECOND

Councilman Young

Councilman Patoka

Councilman Kach

Councilman Jones

Councilman Marks

Councilman Ertel

Councilman Crandell

ROLL CALL - AMENDMENTS

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ROLL CALL - AMENDMENTS

MOTION

AYE NAY

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Councilman Young

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Councilman Kach

Councilman Jones

Councilman Marks

Councilman Ertel

Councilman Crandell