



AMERICAN  
KENNEL CLUB®

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### **American Kennel Club Testimony on SB 122 – Unattended Dogs – Extreme Weather Conditions**

The American Kennel Club (AKC) provides this written testimony on behalf of our Maryland dog clubs and thousands of constituent dog owners in Maryland. By way of introduction, the AKC is the world's largest purebred dog registry. We are a club of more than 5,000 local and breed dog clubs around the country, including 78 clubs in Maryland. Our affiliated clubs maintain America's largest purebred rescue network, and for over 135 years AKC has been proud to be the only non-profit purebred registry devoted to the health and well-being and of all dogs. In 2020, the AKC Canine Health Foundation awarded \$3.29 million in 53 research grants across 23 different research program areas, including multiple educational grants to improve the lives of all dogs. This includes almost \$500,000 in research grants in Maryland.

It is this expertise – and the decades of experience represented by our local kennel clubs and constituent dog owners – that leads us to note some concerns with the current proposal in hopes of having it amended slightly.

We greatly appreciate the opportunity we have had to work with House sponsor, Delegate Lehman, to express our concerns with the legislation. Even more so, we are most appreciative that both Delegate Lehman and Senator Kramer have included the exemptions for dogs lawfully and activity engaged in hunting; livestock herding; sledding; sporting; or training, which oftentimes occurs in temperatures outside those established by the bill, were added as an amendment to last session's predecessor legislation (HB 406 of 2020) and are included in Senate Bill 122. The AKC shares Senator Kramer's concern about the well-being of all dogs. It is for this reason we are asking for amendments to ensure that all dogs are truly protected.

Typically, AKC is not supportive of legislation that uses absolute temperature standards to protect dogs from inclement weather, as it does not take into consideration other factors such as the age, breed, general health and condition of the dog or its ability to withstand the environment. Some dogs thrive in temperatures outside these ranges. In the same way, unfortunately, there are some dogs that simply cannot handle the temperatures permitted in this bill for even 30 minutes – potentially putting those dogs in danger. In addition, even responsible owners would be given the false sense that they are safe because forecasted weather is not predicated to reach or be near the established absolute temperature.

As such, our first recommendation would be to replace the temperatures with language that would not allow dogs outdoors *"during any period in which a hazardous weather advisory or warning has been issued by the National Weather Service for the local area, no dog shall be left in conditions where the health and safety of the dog is at risk."*

We respect, however, that the sponsor desires to keep the temperatures in this bill. To that end, AKC requests the following two small clarifications that will ensure all dogs in all circumstances are protected:

- 1) AKC recommends that language be added that considers **the age, breed, general health and condition of the dog and its ability to withstand the environment**. This would keep the absolute temperature language but would also allow for the needs of various breeds, ages, and the general health of individual dogs to be considered and protected.
- 2) Further, AKC recommends that **"acclimation"** be added to the list of exemptions. While we are pleased that the existing exemptions are included, many sportsmen and other trainers have noted that any time that a trained

dog may be called upon to perform a specific task in potential adverse conditions (for example search and rescue), the dog must first be acclimated to those conditions. This avoids any potential harm that might result from performing the task without proper preparation.

In an initial conversation, House Sponsor Del. Lehman seemed agreeable to such an addition. However, she later stated she and Sen. Kramer were not supportive of the acclimation amendment because it was not necessary according to the purpose of the bill. We understand that intent is aimed at backyards or property that provide no shelter from extreme weather. Unfortunately, any legislation offered must also consider the unintended consequences that could result if the legislation becomes law. Without an exemption for acclimation, an owner, trainer, or handler may not be able to appropriately acclimate a dog in the field or any location without suitable shelter. This is essential as there may be situations when other tasks necessary to prepare for the circumstance requiring the dog to be acclimated requires the owner, trainer, or handler to leave it unattended for a period of greater than thirty minutes. Simply adding acclimation to the list of exemptions would address this concern and allow dogs to be safely prepared for the tasks they are trained to perform.

The AKC agrees with the goals of SB 122 and are grateful and appreciative that it will protect some dogs in the state of Maryland. We believe the addition of language that considers the age, breed, general health and condition of the dog and its ability to withstand the environment will ensure there are no loopholes and that all dogs are protected. Additionally, by adding acclimation to the list of exemptions any unintended consequence associated with preparing a dog for task, like search and rescue, will be eliminated.

Thank you for reviewing and considering my testimony.



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