



## **THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES**

**January 20, 2021**

**Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**SB122**

***Crimes - Unattended Dogs in Extreme Weather Conditions***

**FAVORABLE**

The Humane Society of the United States, on behalf of our members and supporters in Maryland, urge a favorable report on SB122, “Crimes – Unattended Dogs in Extreme Weather Conditions.” Cases of dogs left outside in dangerous weather are one of the most reported types of animal cruelty, but the vagueness of Maryland’s current law makes it difficult for enforcement officers to act before a dog has suffered injury or death due to exposure. SB 122 is very commonsense legislation, simply requiring that dogs are provided proper shelter when temperatures are below 32 or above 90 degrees, or if there is a severe weather warning issued by the National Weather Service.

January 2019’s brutally cold winter highlighted the need for SB 122, as temperatures plummeted with documented actual temperatures below 0 degrees Fahrenheit, and winter weather warnings were issued throughout the state. Maryland’s law offers no protections for dogs left outdoors in these cases of severe weather. Extended exposure to brutally cold temperatures can result in frostbite and potentially deadly hypothermia. In summer months, heat stroke is a common cause of death for dogs. It is a common misconception that dogs’ fur enables them to withstand extreme cold better than humans. In fact, dogs of any breed who are exposed to extreme cold for long periods of time can and do suffer from hypothermia or death. Exposed skin like the nose, ears, and paw pads are highly susceptible to frost bite and can be permanently damaged. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) recommends that dogs, even thick-coated arctic breeds, should not be left outside during below freezing weather – and especially not without shelter that allows the dog to maintain normal body temperature.

Dogs across Maryland are suffering and, in some cases, dying from exposure to extreme cold and heat. A definition of shelter that establishes minimum standards is essential. SB 122 will serve as an educational tool to inform pet owners of the level of care they must provide and will make law enforcement less burdensome by providing criteria for determining when the law has been violated. Like any good law, SB 122 is clear and enforceable, designed to solve a problem at hand, and reasonable for citizens to comply. The amendments added in 2020 also ensure that local jurisdictions with stronger ordinances will not be impacted by this state law, which will serve as a minimum standard for those jurisdictions that have not yet taken local action. SB 122 will protect dogs who live outdoors without creating an undue hardship for owners, and we urge a favorable report.

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