



AMERICAN  
KENNEL CLUB®

January 17, 2022

### **American Kennel Club Testimony on SB 44 – Unattended Dogs – Extreme Weather Conditions and Heat**

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 of all dogs.

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 inclusion of the exemptions for dogs lawfully and actively engaged in hunting; livestock herding or guarding; sledding; sporting; or training, which oftentimes occur in temperatures outside those established by the bill. The AKC shares Senator West's concern about the well-being of all dogs. It is for this reason we are asking for amendments to ensure that all Maryland 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. AKC remains concerned that this bill fails to consider that some breeds thrive in temperatures below 32 degrees or closer to 90 degrees while other dogs require a more moderate climate, and even 30 minutes in temperatures permitted under this proposal could jeopardize their health. 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.

Based on a recent conversation with the Senate sponsor, Senator Chris West, we respect the desire to keep the lower temperature in the bill. To that end, AKC requests the following clarifications that will ensure all dogs in all circumstances are protected:

1. AKC would recommend amending the definition of Extreme Weather Conditions. By adding language like that found in the Code of Baltimore County Ordinance Title 4, Section 12-1-01 definition of "*Adverse Environmental Conditions*" which allows for other cold weather or precipitation-related events to be considered, protection would be afforded to those dogs that truly cannot handle weather approaching 32 degrees Fahrenheit. As such, AKC would recommend adding the following after the word SERVICE on page 1, line 22: **or other cold weather or precipitation-related environmental conditions, including, but not limited to, wind, rain, snow, ice, sleet, or hail, that a person should reasonably conclude would pose an adverse risk to the health or safety of a dog based on 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. In agreement with guidelines provided by the American Veterinary Medical Association for the protection of dogs in summer months that include making sure dogs have access to shade when outside, AKC would recommend page 3, line 15 be amended to add language that requires that **shade and other protection should be provided when the temperatures are such that could result in serious injury, hyperthermia,**

**or death of the animal.** Or, simply removing the existing language on page 3, line 15 and requiring “suitable shade” during a specific warmer weather period of the year, e.g., May 1 to October 1, as several Maryland counties currently do. During a conversation with Senator West, he was agreeable to addressing this matter.

3. Given the diversity of dog breeds and AKC’s belief that the age, breed, general health and condition of the dog and its ability to withstand the environment should be the determining factor that no dog be left in conditions where the health and safety of the dog is at risk, AKC would recommend that the following language be added on page 4, line 19 after the word IF: **an animal control officer, having inspected a dog’s individual circumstances has determined the animal to be safe and well suited and well equipped to tolerate its environment, or ....** Such a provision will allow a professionally trained animal control officer to make the determination instead of an arbitrary number on a thermometer.
4. 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.

AKC agrees with the goals of SB 44 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.



Charley Hall  
Legislative Analyst/Community Outreach Coordinator  
American Kennel Club  
8051 Arco Corporate Drive, Suite 100, Raleigh NC 27617  
t: 919-816-3971 | e: [charles.hall@akc.org](mailto:charles.hall@akc.org)  
Visit our website: [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org)  
Follow us on: [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)