

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2010 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 729 (Cecil County Delegation)
Environmental Matters

Cecil County - Regulation of Domestic Animals

This bill authorizes the Cecil County Commissioners to provide by ordinance for a comprehensive system for the regulation of domestic animals and wild animals held in captivity, including licensing and control.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None.

Local Effect: Cecil County reports that the bill does not significantly affect local finances or operations, as the county does not anticipate using the bill's authority for the foreseeable future. Legislative Services advises, however, that if the county uses the bill's authority to establish a county animal control department, then presumably county finances would be affected. Animal control services are currently the responsibility of the Cecil County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Inc. (SPCA).

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The regulations may include provisions for the impoundment and disposal of unlicensed or dangerous dogs; provisions for the regulation of people who own or keep any animal that disturbs the peace and quiet of a neighborhood or which is vicious; and reasonable penalties for violations, not to exceed 30 days imprisonment or a fine of \$500 or both. The county commissioners are authorized to regulate animals that are hybrids of domestic or wild animals but may not regulate or control wild animals that are not owned or kept by individuals.

Current Law: Pursuant to the Cecil County Code, the Cecil County SPCA is responsible for implementing and enforcing animal control services in the county. Current law provides for the licensing of dogs, kennels, and pet shops. Specified exemptions apply. Any person is prohibited from permitting his/her animal to be at large and not confined or to abandon domesticated animals in the county. Owners who keep their animals outside must provide shelter, food, water, space, and necessary veterinary care. Dogs found without a license tag or running at large must be taken by an animal control officer to the SPCA shelter and confined for a specified period of time. It is unlawful for any person to own or keep a domesticated animal that disturbs the peace and quiet of any neighborhood or that is vicious and bites any person. Current law also addresses such issues as rabies control, reports of animal bites, and the responsibilities of veterinarians. Violators of the animal control provisions are guilty of a civil violation and are subject to an original preset fine not to exceed \$500. Each day is a separate violation.

State law authorizes the county commissioners in Carroll and Frederick counties to provide by ordinance for a comprehensive system for the regulation of domestic animals.

Background: In response to concerns about the current animal control practices in the county, in 2009 the Cecil County Commissioners appointed an Animal Control Task Force to make recommendations to improve animal care and control services that protect the public's health and safety and the health and safety of animals. In its final report, the task force recommended that State law be amended to provide the county with greater authority to regulate and license domestic animals.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: SB 729 (Cecil County Senators) – Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs.

Information Source(s): Cecil County, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 16, 2010
mlm/hlb

Analysis by: Lesley G. Cook

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510