



House Bill 1568

Local Government – Animal Control – Dogs At Large (Dog Leash Laws)

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Judiciary Committee

Date: March 12, 2026

From: Karrington Anderson & Charlotte Fleckenstein

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 1568. This bill would require local governments to adopt a law prohibiting dogs from being “at large” and to establish corresponding impoundment and penalty protocols. While counties agree that responsible pet ownership is a critical component of public safety, this bill represents an unnecessary and duplicative state mandate.

All 23 Maryland counties and Baltimore City already maintain comprehensive animal control ordinances that prohibit dogs from running at large and provide clear enforcement mechanisms. These local systems are well-established and tailored to reflect the local needs of each community, including density and enforcement capacity.

Requiring local governments to amend their codes to conform to a new statewide, one-size-fits-all definition would create an unnecessary administrative burden. Should HB 1568 pass, each county would need to reopen its legislative process, conduct public hearings, revise code language, and retrain enforcement personnel—despite already having functional and enforceable “dogs at large” provisions in place.

Moreover, the bill adopts the broad definition of “running at large” from *Blitzer v. Breski* (2023), which includes dogs unrestrained even on their owner’s property. This conflicts with many county ordinances which limit the term to dogs off the owner’s property and not under immediate control of a responsible person. By codifying this expansive judicial interpretation, HB 1568 would override established local standards and require counties to regulate conduct not traditionally treated as a public safety violation.

Ultimately, local governments are best positioned to define and enforce animal control regulations that reflect local conditions and community standards. Given the comprehensive protections already established across Maryland jurisdictions, additional statewide mandates in this area may be redundant and risk creating inconsistencies with existing local law. Accordingly, MACo respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** report on HB 1568.