

# Testimony for TIEE Hearing, June 13, 2019

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**concerned friends of man's best friend**

*The Maryland Dog Federation is a dog owner advocacy group.*

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June 12, 2019

Good morning members of the TIEE Committee. My name is Adrienne Lefkowitz, President of the Maryland Dog Federation. I appreciate the opportunity to share some thoughts with you.

The MDF has been working toward reforms in the Prince George's Animal Control Code since 1996. The county code often exceeds national standards in many instances and goes a long way to keep the public, and county animals, safe. But not in all ways. There is always opportunity for improvement, however, especially when the improvements are reasonable and do not result in unintended consequences or unnecessary difficulty for Prince George's County residents.

I welcome this briefing to begin the dialog.

We are eager to see the entirety of this proposal and of course particularly concerned about "the breed ban". It's a law that has unfortunately been enforced in the county

for over two decades and continues to hurt thousands of your constituents. I wanted to share some recent findings.

Thousands and thousands of perfectly good, normal pets are STILL taken from their families for doing nothing wrong. Simply for what they look like. Determining a dog's breed is STILL completely subjective, arbitrary, and often based on how much your neighbor insists or complains.

The ban STILL doesn't make the public safer. It DOES, however, subvert animal control resources AWAY from problem dogs to deal with non-problem dogs. Our very conservative estimate of the annual cost of the breed ban to the county Animal Management Division is, at least, \$267,000 per year. That does not include cross agency costs or costs to other county municipal entities such as police, or town and city animal control agencies.

Rescues and shelters inside and outside the county are put in the position of having to SAVE dogs from Prince George's county that are seized or impounded (or surrendered under threat of arrest) for no reason other than their physical appearance. These other groups are being forced to clean up the mess of the breed ban, saving our county dogs from our needless animal control law. These other groups have their own dogs to save and find homes for, yet they are desperate to save these dogs too. The county is foisting these dogs onto shelters and other

private non-profit rescues in the surrounding jurisdictions when they should never have entered the shelter system in the first place. The dogs lucky enough to get out to a rescue or shelter are perfectly good dogs that are rehomed outside the county.

If the dogs are able to live OUTSIDE the county, they should be able to live INSIDE the county. With their families who loved them. We need behavior-based laws, not breed- or looks-based ones.

The veterinarians we have interviewed whose clinics are in this county, bordering other counties, have reported a loss of business because clients fear bringing their targeted dogs into the county. They also report a loss of in-county clients with “targeted dogs”, indicating clients are traveling outside the county for veterinary care, or they are not seeking veterinary care at all.

Vacation kennel businesses located in the county cannot accept “pit bulls” as clients, or anything that remotely resembles one, for fear it will be turned in. Those pets can be confiscated from those businesses. There is one kennel owner I spoke with who wanted to put her business in Prince George’s County but went to Anne Arundel county instead to avoid turning away clients that are “illegal” in the former, but perfectly legal in the latter.

Next to the many heartbreaking calls from people seeking help because their dog has been taken from them for being an “illegal” dog, the most common call or email we get is from people who are trying to move into Prince George’s county and want to know if their dog is safe here. I advise them their dog is NOT safe here; to find a home in a neighboring county. Out of an abundance of caution I must advise them that the law is arbitrarily, but actively enforced, and neighbor-initiated. Your dog may be a Boxer Labrador mix where you came from but could be a “pit bull” here. We believe the number of people who do not move here because of the ban is significant, especially because short-haired, round-headed, stocky, parti-colored dogs who might resemble “pit bulls” are among the most common dogs in the U.S. We have heard from U of Maryland professors and post-grads, Joint Base Andrews employees and deployees, other military families, and government employees, even FBI employees when the Bureau was contemplating a move to Prince George’s. We advised them their dogs were not safe here.

Amazon is well known for its strong corporate dog culture. The young, progressive millennials moving into the county are a huge economic driver in a number of county real estate markets. They adopt their dogs from shelters, and shelters are adopting out dogs that are banned in this country. We will have no choice but to encourage Amazon employees to live, work, and play in D.C., or Northern Virginia, where Commonwealth law prevents dogs from

being declared dangerous solely by virtue of their physical appearance.

Approximately 96% of the U.S. population can choose their dog without concern over having it taken away for what she looks like. Over the last two years alone I can think of about 20 municipalities that have either repealed their long standing ban (some older than Prince George's), or considered implementing BDL but decided against it, going for better generic laws instead. I believe we are up to 22 States – almost half -- that actually prohibit banning dogs by breed or physical appearance, among them our neighbors Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, New Jersey, and New York.

Let's make the county, and its animal control laws, the best it can be. I look forward to working with you.

Thank you