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	Subject	Council Bill 14-0421 Animal Control – Fighting Dogs		

To: President and Members
of the City Council
c/o 409 City Hall

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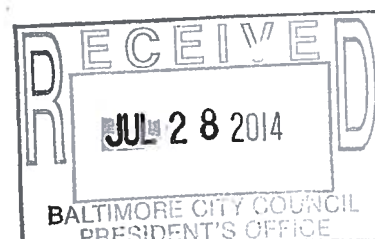
The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is pleased to have the opportunity to review Council Bill 14-0421 Animal Control and Protection – Fighting Dogs. The purpose of this bill is to prohibit the keeping, training, selling, or breeding of fighting dogs; to provide for the investigation and disposition of dogs believed to be attack dogs or fighting dogs; to consolidate existing provisions relating to vicious animals; to adjust the requirements for holding pregnant animals and animals under investigation; to define certain terms; to set certain penalties; to clarify and conform related animal control and protection provisions.

Last year BCHD, Police and the State’s Attorney’s Office made important changes in the way animal abuse cases are investigated and brought forward for prosecution. As a result of these changes, more complex investigations have been undertaken that have led to the discovery of numerous suspected dogfighting operations within the City. Over 150 dogs have already been removed from conditions that can only be described as horrific and seizures of animals are ongoing.

Tragically, the majority of the dogs seized are incapable of being socialized as companion animals and they pose an unreasonable risk of harm to people or other animals even if housed and cared for in a responsible manner.

BCHD does not currently have the authority to provide a timely disposition of the animals and the dogs are put on indefinite hold until the case is resolved. Long-term confinement is detrimental to the dog’s health and welfare and many develop behavioral issues. Self injury is common in these cases and the animal unduly suffers as a result. An otherwise adoptable dog may become unadoptable as a result of an extended confinement. For the dogs that are incapable of being socialized it is particularly cruel to keep them confined as their behavior worsens each day of confinement.

Coupled with this is the fact that many also have serious health issues and injuries that require treatment and extended veterinary care. While ultimately such care might reverse the physical trauma, the psychological trauma experienced by these animals remains in many cases. The



Health Department needs the authority to humanely euthanize such unadoptable animals or to transfer them to a rescue organization that can handle their particular needs.

Another provision of the legislation deals with the practice of breeding dogs for fighting and suspected breeding operations are a common finding at the locations from which the animals are seized. Puppies that are seized would be destined to a life of cruelty and inhumane care should they be returned to the location. Housing puppies in any shelter environment is always a risk due to the high volume of traffic of animals with unknown vaccination histories and illnesses and the ease with which young animals can contract illness. For this reason, it is extremely important for the Health Department to have the authority to quickly place puppies permanently in homes, rescue or humane organizations.

For these reasons BCHD supports this bill and will be available at the hearing to answer any additional questions the Committee may have.

cc: Angela Gibson, Office of the Mayor
Patrick Chaulk, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Department of Health
Shannon Mace Heller, Interim Legislative Director, Department of Health