



A conversation about accountability, public safety,
and catastrophic dog attacks in Maryland.

Cheryl Balassone
Howard County, Maryland



HOLLY'S STORY

In December 2025, my beloved dog Holly suffered catastrophic injuries in a multi-dog attack at a Howard County public park. Despite emergency treatment, surgery, and extraordinary efforts to save her, **she did not survive.**

Holly was deeply loved and an important part of my daily life and family. As a senior citizen living alone, her companionship and daily presence carried extraordinary meaning. Like so many companion animals, she was not "just a pet." She was my primary source of joy, comfort, purpose, and emotional connection.

In the aftermath of Holly's death, I began researching Maryland law and speaking with legislators to better understand how severe and fatal dog attacks are currently addressed within the state. Those conversations consistently returned to two recurring concerns: how current compensation frameworks address catastrophic attacks, particularly those involving multiple dogs, and the absence of centralized statewide data regarding severe and fatal dog attacks

Organizations such as DogsBite.org and other reporting efforts have documented ongoing concerns involving severe and multi-dog attacks. Maryland currently has no centralized statewide reporting system for consistently tracking these incidents. Without standardized statewide data, comprehensive evaluation of incidence patterns, severity trends, repeat circumstances, multi-dog prevalence, and long-term victim impacts is simply not possible.

At the same time, catastrophic incidents often involve substantial veterinary expenses, significant emotional trauma, public safety concerns, and long-term consequences that are not fully reflected within existing legal and compensation frameworks.

Holly's Law was born from the belief that catastrophic preventable attacks deserve acknowledgment, accountability, and thoughtful policy solutions within a legal framework that more accurately reflects the seriousness of these losses.





CURRENT LEGISLATIVE & PUBLIC POLICY CONCERNS

- Existing Maryland compensation frameworks were not designed to account for catastrophic circumstances involving multiple attacking dogs, severe harm, preventable attacks, or clear negligence.
- Victims often encounter limited protections, inconsistent accountability structures, and uneven transparency following severe preventable incidents.
- Maryland currently lacks a centralized statewide tracking system for severe and fatal dog attacks.
- Limited statewide data does not allow the evaluation of patterns, repeat circumstances, severity trends, and policy effectiveness.
- Multi-dog attacks appear frequently among many severe and fatal incidents involving both companion animals and people, often resulting in substantially greater injuries, trauma, costs, and long-term consequences.

Building On Existing Progress

Maryland took an important step forward with the passage of Buddy's Law in 2025, which increased the compensation cap for cases involving the injury or death of a companion animal from \$10,000 to \$25,000.

Holly's Law is intended to continue broader conversations regarding practical reforms as lawmakers, advocates, and communities continue evaluating catastrophic incidents involving companion animals. Early discussion areas currently include examination of compensation structures involving catastrophic multi-dog attacks and improved statewide tracking and reporting.

The initiative is focused on encouraging thoughtful discussion surrounding devastating circumstances involving severe harm, preventable attacks, public safety concerns, or clear negligence, not ordinary pet disputes or minor incidents.





PROPOSED PHASE ONE REFORM CONCEPTS

While Holly's Law is envisioned as a broader long-term advocacy effort, current discussions are focused on two practical concepts for early consideration.

1 Examination of Compensation Structures

Discussion regarding how current compensation frameworks address catastrophic circumstances involving:

- Multiple attacking dogs
- Severe or fatal injuries
- Preventable dangerous situations
- Clear negligence involving known risks

Multi-dog attacks often involve substantially greater injuries, trauma, veterinary costs, emotional harm, and long-term consequences for victims and families. Current frameworks fail to fully account for the realities of these catastrophic circumstances.

This concept is intended to encourage thoughtful discussion regarding how Maryland's existing structures address the severity and complexity of certain preventable incidents.

2 Statewide Tracking & Reporting

A centralized Maryland reporting mechanism for severe and fatal dog attacks would improve statewide data collection and evaluation. It would help legislators, public safety officials, animal welfare organizations, and communities better evaluate:

- Incidence patterns
- Multi-dog attack prevalence
- Severity trends
- Repeat circumstances, and
- Policy effectiveness

Presently, the lack of centralized statewide reporting does not allow accurate assessment of the frequency, characteristics, and broader impacts of catastrophic incidents.





THE LONGER-TERM VISION

While current conversations are focused on practical and potentially achievable early reforms, Holly's Law reflects a broader vision centered on accountability, public safety, transparency, and victim protections involving catastrophic preventable dog attacks in Maryland.

Future policy considerations may include:

- stronger accountability mechanisms involving known dangerous dogs,
- examination of civil liability and compensation frameworks,
- improved statewide transparency and reporting,
- consumer and victim protection considerations,
- public safety and risk-management approaches, and
- modernization of legal structures that may not fully reflect the realities of catastrophic companion-animal incidents.

Holly's Law seeks to foster thoughtful dialogue among legislators, advocacy organizations, legal professionals, insurers, animal policy stakeholders, and the public regarding practical solutions and potential avenues for reform.

The initiative is not focused on unlimited damages or broad changes involving ordinary disputes or minor incidents. Its focus is intentionally narrow: catastrophic circumstances involving severe harm, preventable attacks, public safety concerns, and/or clear negligence.

Important Clarification

I am currently involved in civil litigation arising from the incident described in this proposal. Holly's Law will not affect that matter, nor would the proposed reforms apply retroactively.

The purpose of this proposal is prospective in nature: to encourage discussion of measures that could address future cases involving catastrophic injury or death of a companion animal while advancing public safety objectives.





CLOSING THOUGHTS

Holly's Law is an evolving advocacy effort focused on encouraging thoughtful discussion regarding accountability, public safety, victim protections, and catastrophic companion-animal attacks in Maryland.

Meaningful policy reform often develops through collaboration, data, lived experience, and open dialogue among stakeholders with diverse perspectives. It is my hope that Holly's story can help foster a better understanding of the challenges victims face following catastrophic attacks and help advance practical solutions that protect both animals and the people who love them as discussions continue regarding potential reforms for the 2027 Maryland General Assembly session.

I look forward to continuing this conversation and exploring ways we can work together to improve accountability, public safety, and protections for victims of catastrophic attacks.

Thank you for taking the time to review this proposal and consider the ideas presented.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Balassone

Howard County, Maryland

cheryl1109@gmail.com

443-250-4077





HollysLawMD.com
cheryl1109@gmail.com