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This act summary is provided for the convenience of the public and members of the General Assembly. It is intended to provide a general summary of the act and may not be exhaustive. It has been prepared by the staff of the Office of Legislative Counsel without input from members of the General Assembly. It is not intended to aid in the interpretation of legislation or to serve as a source of legislative intent.

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**Act No. 167 (H.626). An act relating to animal welfare**

**Subjects: Public safety; animal welfare; importation of animals; Division of Animal Welfare; animal shelters and animal rescue organizations**

This act establishes a Division of Animal Welfare at the Department of Public Safety. The Commissioner of Public Safety is required to appoint a Director of the Division. The Director must be qualified and have: professional experience in animal welfare laws; knowledge of stakeholders; and knowledge of animal welfare and cruelty issues. The Director shall develop a comprehensive plan for the development, implementation, and enforcement of the State's animal welfare laws. In developing the plan, the Director shall consult with other State agencies that respond to animal welfare complaints or with animal welfare responsibilities to quantify the amount of time State agency staff expend in fulfilling animal welfare responsibilities, including the costs to agencies of fulfilling the responsibilities. The Director shall be the only Division employee until the comprehensive plan is complete and the General Assembly enacts legislation, as needed, to implement the comprehensive plan. The act establishes the Animal Welfare Fund to fund the expenses incurred by the Division of Animal Welfare. A two-dollar surcharge on annual dog licenses issued in the State shall be deposited into the Animal Welfare Fund. In addition, the act amends the definition of "humane officer" under the animal cruelty statutes.

Multiple effective dates, beginning on July 1, 2024