



Committee: Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs
Legislation: SB 28
Position: SUPPORT
Date: January 23, 2020

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee:

The Arundel Rivers Federation requests a favorable report for SB28, a common sense, yet overdue, measure to prevent the littering of our State and killing of marine life.

Introduction

Allowing balloons into the air is simply littering. It is unclear why State and local authorities do not currently enforce Maryland's litter control law in relation to this practice. Currently, littering in the traditional sense carries a \$1,500.00 fine (and the possibility of imprisonment for 30 days).¹ While Arundel Rivers sees no real distinction between the littering described in the criminal code and the practice of delivering garbage to the environment through the air first, we are mindful of the ceremonial value derived by some practitioners of the practice, and thus have no objection to the lesser penalty proscribed in the bill. Accordingly, we support its passage and urge a favorable report.

Harm to Sea Life

It is probably evident to members of this committee that plastic waste has caused tremendous harm to wildlife, especially marine life, since its inception. If not, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has published a helpful and succinct primer on the subject.² A word of warning about the FWS publication: the photographs of dead animals are graphic.

Some more analytical committee members may wish for hard numbers on the subject. It is difficult to quantify the total number of balloons that have caused the death of an animal. Rather than speculate as to total mortality however, we may consider likelihood of mortality. Last year the University of Tasmania published a study finding that "Balloons or balloon fragments were the marine debris *most likely to cause mortality*, and they killed almost one in five of the seabirds that ingested them." *Id.* (emphasis supplied). The authors went on to explain that "[a]lthough soft plastics accounted for just 5 per cent of the items ingested they were responsible for more than 40 per cent of the mortalities."

That's for the birds. What about other animals? The University of Tasmania study actually grew out of prior research on sea turtles, and pointed out that "similar research into plastic ingestion by sea turtles has found...that while hard plastic fragments may pass quickly through the gut, soft plastics are more likely to become compacted and cause fatal obstructions" in sea turtles.

¹ Md. Code. Ann. Crim. §10-110(f)(2)(i) "A person who disposes of litter in violation of this section in an amount not exceeding 100 pounds or 27 cubic feet and not for commercial gain is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to imprisonment not exceeding 30 days or a fine not exceeding \$1,500 or both."

² Available at <https://www.fws.gov/news/blog/index.cfm/2015/8/5/balloons-and-wildlife-please-dont-release-your-balloons>

Conclusion

We realize that most incidents of balloon release are not specifically intended to harm sea creatures, despoil our coastlines, cause power outages, to tangle into our trees. It is important that those who have used a balloon release to honor the memory of a friend or loved one not be shamed for that act. There are alternatives ways to honor our friends and family, and perhaps the discussion on this bill will help popularize acts like waving flags, banners, or streamers. Perhaps even flying a kite with a special photograph, or blowing bubbles, or casting flowers into the air could be employed to send up the memories of our cherished departed. We must not mourn death by causing more of it.

Respectfully submitted,



Jesse L. Iliff
South, West & Rhode RIVERKEEPER®
Arundel Rivers Federation, Inc.
2822 Solomons Island Rd., Suite 202
Edgewater, MD 21037
(410) 224-3802
jesse@arundelrivers.org