



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

February 15, 2023

Environment and Transportation Committee

HB 378

***Natural Resources - Black Bear Conflict Reduction and Damage Reimbursement Fund – Uses
FAVORABLE***

The Humane Society of the United States, on behalf of our Maryland members and supporters, supports HB378, which provides communities and farmers alike with funds to *prevent* human-bear conflicts *before* they occur.

This legislation will help provide funding for innovative programs that promoted coexistence in other states. For example, in Durango, Colorado, Dr. Johnson and others set up a bear trash-proofing experiment. They gave two study groups of residents bear-resistant trash containers, enhanced those residents' bear-aware education, served residents with warnings and worked with the city to increase law enforcement. Meanwhile, two control groups of residents did not receive free bear-proof trash cans, enhanced education, warnings or law enforcement. The outcome was significant: the study groups saw bear conflicts decline by 60 percent. During this study, bears learned to leave the areas where residents complied with trash laws and shifted to areas of the city where human foods were readily abundant. Dr. Johnson emphasizes that law enforcement was a key factor in reducing bear conflicts in Durango.¹ At the Oct. 2022, 6th International Human-Bear Conflict Workshop, that group of researchers reported that 98% of trash cans in Durango, Colorado are now bear resistant, with two-thirds having automatic locking lids. This increased compliance dramatically—researchers reported 92% compliance with automatically locking lids.² Education and law enforcement are key to reducing urban bear conflicts. Rural communities similarly need help with installing electric fencing or other deterrents around beehives, chicken coops, livestock pastures or even some crops.

It is clear from multiple human-bear conflict studies that bear hunting is not an appropriate method of addressing that concern.³ A brand new journal article shows that when researchers in Canada tested whether a new bear-hunting season in Ontario reduced human-bear conflicts, it did not even as hunters killed a “significant” number of bears. Researchers write, “there was no concomitant reduction in interactions or incidents and, in fact, these [interactions] were higher in areas with the new spring season relative to control areas.”⁴

Black bears are sparsely populated across vast areas. In their lifetimes, bears produce few offspring, but devoted mothers care for their cubs for extended periods—up to two years. Females are not adults until they are between 3-5 years old. And they produce litters only every 2-3 years. Only about 50% of their cubs ever make it to their first year of life.

If that weren't enough of a challenge for them, in North America bears have faced substantial habitat losses and that problem is worsening. Bears are limited by many factors including erratic weather conditions that harm their natural food sources, such as acorns, making them unavailable in some years.⁵ If bears don't put on enough weight before they enter their dens to hibernate, females will not reproduce and some bears, especially cubs, will not survive the winter.

Bears are extremely valuable to our ecosystems and economy, which is why we should protect them in Maryland. Researchers find that bears are as intelligent as great apes. And they're hugely beneficial to their habitats. For example, they spread more seed than birds, and when they're out of the den, their presence protects gray foxes from



mortality by other medium-sized carnivores. Bears are one of the most photographed and beloved of wildlife in North America. In some states or provinces, local communities literally earn millions of dollars from black bear ecotourism.

We understand that the bill has a large fiscal note and requires an annual appropriation into the Fund. We welcome a conversation with this Committee regarding the funding level you deem appropriate given the State's other budgetary considerations. We also appreciate that legislation has been introduced this session that would increase funding for Maryland's Wildlife and Heritage Service, and believe a portion of that funding could be used to offset this cost. And the benefits of this bill in both directly decreasing human financial loss does offset the cost to the State in funding it.

Life for bears grows harder every year. In order to co-exist with them, we need to use innovation to prevent conflicts before they occur. We thank the committee for its consideration of the bill and urge a favorable vote on HB378.

*For more information contact Jennifer Bevan-Dangel, Maryland State Director
jbevandangel@humanesociety.org | C 410-303-7954*

¹ Heather Johnson et al., "Assessing Ecological and Social Outcomes of a Bear-Proofing Experiment," *The Journal of Wildlife Management* (2018).

² Cassandre Venumiere-Lefebvre et al., "Follow-up Evaluation on the Effectiveness of a Large-Scale Effort to Use Bear-Resistant Garbage Cans, Including Automatic and Manual-Locking Cans, for Limiting Conflict in Durango, Co" (paper presented at the 6th International Human-Bear Workshop, Lake Tahoe, NV, 2022).

³ H. E. Johnson et al., "Shifting Perceptions of Risk and Reward: Dynamic Selection for Human Development by Black Bears in the Western United States," *Biological Conservation* 187 (2015); H. E. Johnson et al., "Human Development and Climate Affect Hibernation in a Large Carnivore with Implications for Human-Carnivore Conflicts," *Journal of Applied Ecology* 55, no. 2 (2018); S. Baruch-Mordo et al., "Stochasticity in Natural Forage Production Affects Use of Urban Areas by Black Bears: Implications to Management of Human-Bear Conflicts," *Plos One* 9, no. 1 (2014); D. L. Garshelis et al., "Is Diversionary Feeding an Effective Tool for Reducing Human-Bear Conflicts? Case Studies from North America and Europe," *Ursus* 28, no. 1 (2017); M. A. Barrett et al., "Testing Bear-Resistant Trash Cans in Residential Areas of Florida," *Southeastern Naturalist* 13, no. 1 (2014); Elizabeth F. Pienaar, David Telesco, and Sarah Barrett, "Understanding People's Willingness to Implement Measures to Manage Human-Bear Conflict in Florida," *Journal of Wildlife Management* 79, no. 5 (2015).

⁴ Joseph M. Northrup et al., "Experimental Test of the Efficacy of Hunting for Controlling Human-Wildlife Conflict," *The Journal of Wildlife Management* (2023).

⁵ Johnson et al., "Human Development and Climate Affect Hibernation in a Large Carnivore with Implications for Human-Carnivore Conflicts.;" D. L. Lewis et al., "Modeling Black Bear Population Dynamics in a Human-Dominated Stochastic Environment," *Ecological Modelling* 294 (2014).