

MD gamefowl Senateletter of support_12-6-22GRH.pdf

Uploaded by: Gail Hansen

Position: FAV

March 5, 2024

This testimony is on behalf of The Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA), a national association of approximately 9,000 veterinary professionals with a focus on animal welfare. I write to express the HSVMA's strong support for SB 1055, legislation in the Agriculture Code to combat Maryland cockfighting operations by limiting the number of adult roosters who may be maintained on a parcel of property.

Despite Maryland's strong animal fighting laws, gamefowl yard owners in the state illegally raise and sell adult roosters for the purpose of cockfighting.

Cockfighting involves forcing two animals with metal weapons attached to their legs to fight to the death. Kids are also often involved, desensitizing them to the suffering of others. There is no excuse for this barbaric and illegal activity that causes extreme animal cruelty and degrades our communities.

Moreover, cockfighters who breed roosters for fighting can easily maintain hundreds of birds outside with no vaccinations, regulatory oversight, or protection from wild birds – creating a significant risk of avian disease contagion. Recently, as you may know, avian influenza has caused bird flu outbreaks in 49 states, including Maryland where it has affected nearly 2 million commercial and backyard birds.

Gamefowl may also be a health risk to people because they are associated with infections including salmonella, campylobacter, and E. coli. These infections are common in chickens and do not always cause illness in the birds, but infections in people often results in illness, hospitalization and even death.

The legislation is an appropriate remedy to the detrimental aspects of cockfighting because there is essentially no reason to possess a significant number of roosters other than for the purpose of cockfighting. Also, the sale of gamefowl both domestically and internationally is often the most profitable aspect of the illegal cockfighting industry.

Finally, there is no reason to believe there will be unintended consequences with this legislation. Commercial poultry operations are exempt and, even though smaller broiler operations could have more than 5 roosters, the birds would be killed before they are adults. Also, the legislation does not apply to gamebirds used for hunting – such as pheasants and quail -- which are different than gamefowl, which are used for cockfighting.

There is no purpose in possessing a significant number of roosters other than for cockfighting. The sale of gamefowl, both domestically and internationally for hundreds or thousands of dollars is often the most profitable aspect of the illegal cockfighting industry.

Based on all the arguments above, we encourage you help Maryland get out of the cockfighting business by voting in favor of SB 1055.

Sincerely,

Gail R. Hansen DVM, MPH
Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association

MD Gamefowl Research Report Summary.pdf

Uploaded by: Jennifer Bevan-Dangel

Position: FAV

Protect Maryland Poultry

Protect animals, public health and communities

PASS SB1055/HB1030

A Maryland rooster limit law would help protect communities in Maryland from the nuisance, avian disease and crimes associated with cockfighting.

A Maryland rooster law will not affect commercial poultry operations, backyard breeders, or members of 4-H or Future Farmers of America. Instead, it will protect animals, public health and communities by cracking down on those who keep and sell roosters for cockfighting.

Individuals keeping a large number of roosters are likely raising them for cockfighting. In a cockfight, two birds have metal weapons attached to their legs and are forced to fight to the death. Birds suffer painful deaths while spectators gamble on their fate. Cockfighting is also associated with numerous other crimes, such as drug trafficking, illegal weapon dealing, and even homicide.

Cockfighters who breed roosters for fighting typically maintain them outside, tethered in unsanitary conditions with no oversight. Because the birds are housed outside, gamefowl yards create an ideal environment for the spread of avian flu, as the birds are exposed to migratory birds that carry and transmit avian flu as well as other diseases. In the last two years, avian flu has affected more than eighty million birds in the U.S. – mostly poultry for human consumption.

Despite being illegal, cockfighting – and the illegal gamefowl yards associated with it – is occurring in Maryland.

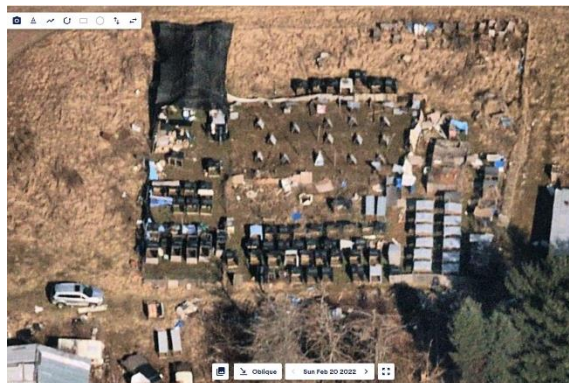
We are aware of four arrests related to running a cockfighting operation over the past nine years from four separate counties: Montgomery, Anne Arundel, Harford and Calvert. Three of those occurred in the last five years, leading to some concern that this activity is increasing in the state.

Anne Arundel, 2015: an Odenton man was arrested on cockfighting charges and possession of cockfighting paraphernalia. He allegedly had prior criminal history of repeated sexual offenses on a minor, child abuse, and traffic violations. He was charged with 89 cockfighting-related charges; 67 counts of animal cruelty for cockfighting, and 22 charges for possession of cockfighting paraphernalia (cockfighting implements). The Maryland Department of Agriculture reportedly ordered all 270 of the birds destroyed after testing positive for four highly contagious diseases, including infectious bronchitis. Police do not believe cockfighting occurred on the farm, but the birds were being raised there to be sold for cockfighting.



Calvert County, 2022: a Huntingtown man was charged with 9 counts of animal cruelty for cockfighting and 1 count of possessing a cockfighting implement. Although this property did not have a traditional gamefowl yard, the individual allegedly owned, sold, trained and transported nine roosters “with the intent that the fowl be used in a cockfight.” Some of the flock of 9 tested positive for laryngotracheitis, an infectious respiratory disease.

Harford County, 2021: an individual was charged with and convicted of aggravated animal cruelty, cockfighting, being a cockfight spectator and abuse and neglect of an animal and running cockfighting ring. He allegedly ran the cockfighting operation from a 36-acre property in Street zoned for agricultural use. Satellite imagery shows evidence of a gamefowl yard. Detectives reportedly seized 209 fowl from the property, as well as “multiple pieces of evidence indicative of a cockfighting operation.” As Harford County Sheriff Jeffrey Gahler said in a statement, “It is hard to believe this type of animal cruelty could be occurring in our community, but it serves to illustrate that no place is immune from this type of activity.”



Montgomery County, 2019: a Silver Spring resident was arrested on charges of aggravated cruelty to animals. He was charged with 22 counts of aggravated cruelty to animals. According to the Statement of Charges, more than 100 roosters and hens were removed from a property in Burtonsville, and several roosters had their combs and wattles removed. Implements associated with cockfighting were found. Satellite imagery of his Burtonsville property reportedly shows evidence of a gamefowl yard.



This bill is needed to address illicit cockfighting operations because, under current law, it is exceedingly difficult to prove birds are possessed with the intent to fight them. This legislation sets a limit for how many roosters can be kept on a property, creating a simple misdemeanor that gives local Animal Control Officers and the Department of Agriculture the authority to protect animals, communities and the Maryland poultry industry from the negative consequences of cockfighting.

Support SB1055/HB1030: Agriculture – Roosters – Restrictions

SB1055_FAV_HSUS.pdf

Uploaded by: Jennifer Bevan-Dangel

Position: FAV



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

March 5, 2024

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

SB 1055

Agriculture - Roosters – Restrictions

FAVORABLE

The Humane Society of the United States, on behalf of our supporters across Maryland, requests a favorable report on SB 1055. This legislation would advance animal welfare and protect public health by creating a simpler mechanism to address the ills of cockfighting in our state.

Cockfighting is a widespread criminal industry in the U.S. and, despite its strong cockfighting laws, Maryland is not immune. For example, in May of 2022, a Baltimore County man was convicted of running a cockfighting operation in Harford County. Detectives seized 209 birds from his property, as well as evidence indicative of a cockfighting operation. Indeed, images of his property showed evidence of a gamefowl yard – a tract of land specifically used for breeding and selling birds for fighting.

In 2019, a Montgomery County man was charged with 22 counts of aggravated animal cruelty after law enforcement removed more than 100 roosters and hens from his property. Several of the birds' combs and wattles were reportedly removed, which is indicative of cockfighting. Images of his property similarly showed evidence of a gamefowl yard.

This legislation will help address these cockfighting crimes, and specifically the gamefowl yards, by offering a strong compliment to existing state cockfighting laws. The bill provides a misdemeanor penalty under the Agriculture Code for the possession of more than 5 adult roosters per acre, or 25 total, on a parcel of property. Maryland needs this new provision to cut off the most profitable aspect of cockfighting – the breeding and sale of fighting birds.

In a typical cockfighting sales operation, adult roosters are bred and raised for the purpose of fighting. They are maintained outside with minimal shelter and then illegally sold for hundreds or thousands of dollars to cockfighters both domestically and internationally.

This bill is needed to address these illicit operations because, under current law, it is exceedingly difficult to prove birds are possessed with the intent to fight them. As there is essentially no reason to possess a significant number of adult roosters other than for cockfighting, this bill does not impact any commercial farmer. Finally, to ensure there are no

unintended consequences, the bill provides exceptions for commercial poultry operations, animal shelters and rescues, and 4-H and Future Farmers of America projects.

Cockfighting is an important crime to address because it is a cruel and inexcusable practice that profits from violent cruelty to animals. It involves pitting two animals with metal weapons attached to their legs to fight to the death for the purpose of profit, gambling, and entertainment.

In addition, as law enforcement can attest, cockfighting is often associated with other criminal activities such as drug trafficking, gang activity, and illegal weapon sales. Cockfighting has even been associated with organized crime and human trafficking.

Maybe most importantly to this committee, cockfighting is also a risk to Maryland's poultry industry because gamefowl are associated with the spread of avian diseases. For example, gamefowl are a high-risk disease vector for avian flu because they are raised without protection from wild birds, transported across the country without oversight, and often exposed to bloody birds under stressful fighting conditions. As members of the committee are well aware, avian flu has been devastating to the U.S. poultry industry, including in Maryland.

There are recent examples in Maryland of the direct connection between cockfighting and avian disease. In a 2015 Anne Arundel County case, an Odenton man faced 89 cockfighting related charges and 67 counts of animal cruelty. The Maryland Department of Agriculture ordered all 270 birds seized in the case euthanized after testing allegedly found two serious viruses and bacterial infections. More recently, in a 2022 cockfighting case in Calvert County, seized birds reportedly tested positive for laryngotracheitis -- an acute, highly contagious, herpesvirus infection of chickens.

Agriculture experts agree on the risk cockfighting poses to the poultry industry. The USDA's Inspector General testified to Congress that, "Birds utilized in animal fighting competitions present a health risk to humans and animals because the birds may carry infectious diseases such as Exotic Newcastle Disease and AI [avian influenza]." The National Chicken Council testified in support of the Federal Animal Fighting Prohibition Act calling cockfighting "an inhumane practice that presents a continuing threat to the health of commercial flocks".

For all these reasons, we urge you to support SB 1055 to protect animals, our communities, and the poultry industry from the clearly detrimental aspects of cockfighting.

Agriculture -Roosters - Restrictions- SB 1055 Fin

Uploaded by: Lisa Radov

Position: FAV



MARYLAND VOTES FOR ANIMALS

PO Box 10411
BALTIMORE, MD 21209

March 5, 2024

To: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
From: Lisa Radov, President and Chair, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.
Re: Agriculture - Roosters – Restrictions – SB 1055 - Support

Chair Feldman, Vice - Chair Kagan, members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Lisa Radov. I am the President and Chairman of Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc. We champion humane legislation to improve the lives of animals in Maryland. Speaking for Maryland Votes for Animals, our Board of Directors, and our members across the State of Maryland, I respectfully ask that the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee vote favorably for Agriculture - Roosters – Restrictions – SB 1055.

This bill would prohibit, unless authorized by the Department of Agriculture, a person from keeping a certain number of roosters on certain property beginning on January 1, 2026, subject to certain exceptions; authorizing the Department to work in cooperation with a local animal control or law enforcement officer to enforce the Act; and establishing a fine of \$1,000 for a violation of the Act.

Maryland has taken a strong stance against cockfighting, which involves roosters. Unless the roosters are being used for agricultural purposes, there are concerns that a large number of roosters being kept could be used for not only for cockfighting, which is illegal in Maryland, but also that they could present a potential health hazard in the form of Avian Flu.

SB 1055 would ensure that the cockfighting industry could not find a home in Maryland and also protect the health and well-being of Marylanders.

In closing, I would like to thank Senator Kramer for his sponsorship of SB 1055 and ask the committee for a favorable report.

SB 1055 Agriculture roosters restrictions- in favo

Uploaded by: Patty Crankshaw-Quimby

Position: FAV



**Maryland's Association of Animal Care and Control
Agencies and Humane Societies**

**PO Box 1143
Easton, Maryland 21601**

**SB 1055 Agriculture Roosters Restrictions
Maryland Senate Energy, Education and Environment Committee**

February 29, 2024

Dear Honorable Chairman Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the committee:

Professional Animal Workers of Maryland, the state organization comprised of animal control agencies and humane societies unanimously supports and encourages a favorable and speedy report on SB 1055 limiting the number of roosters allowed on a certain parcel of land.

While it is illegal, our communities across the state are still encountering the acts of cockfighting and the breeding of animals for this crime. From nuisance complaints of more than 80 roosters in a residential area to the arrest and conviction of those holding more than 100 birds, these cases are not as rare as way may like to think. To be able to limit, track and manage the number of roosters on a property and for what purpose will be an especially valuable tool in the toolbox of humane law enforcement across the state when tackling this issue.

Not only are we concerned about the acts of breeding and fighting these animals, the health concerns for these and other flocks in the area are vitally important. We know that in the past year we have had major outbreaks of avian flu in our state on both sides of the bay. The birds used for cockfighting are not regulated in their uses, rarely vaccinated, and often being transported across states, in turn causing more potential illnesses in our Maryland flocks. We see this bill as a tool in preventing cockfighting at its core—the breeders and protecting other Maryland flocks.

Professional Animal Workers of Maryland believes the passing of SB 1055 is a valuable tool in our work to serve the animals and people of Maryland.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Patty Crankshaw-Quimby, CAWA

Executive Director/Chief Animal Control Officer: Talbot Humane/ Talbot County Animal Control

President: Professional Animal Workers of Maryland

SB 1055 - MoCo_Animal Services_FAV (GA 24).pdf

Uploaded by: Sara Morningstar

Position: FAV



Montgomery County

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

ROCKVILLE: 240-777-6550

ANNAPOLIS: 240-777-8270

SB 1055

DATE: March 5, 2024

SPONSOR: Senator Kramer

ASSIGNED TO: Education, Energy, and the Environment

CONTACT PERSON: Sara Morningstar (Sara.Morningstar@montgomerycountymd.gov)

POSITION: SUPPORT (Montgomery County Office of Animal Services)

Agriculture – Roosters – Restrictions

Senate Bill 1055 addresses cockfighting in Maryland by prohibiting, with certain exceptions, a person from keeping more than five roosters per acre or more than 25 roosters on a single property beginning January 1, 2026, unless authorized by the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA). Upon conviction, violators could face a penalty of up to \$1,000. The bill provides exceptions for the number of roosters if the owner is a member of 4-H, the Future Farmers of America, a commercial poultry producer, a school, or a government-owned animal shelter. The MDA would be responsible for enforcement and could work in cooperation with local animal control offices or law enforcement. The Montgomery County Office of Animal Services supports SB 1055.

Roosters are protective of their hens, and too many roosters in one area can lead to fighting and harassment of the hens. Accepted animal husbandry practices limit the number of roosters in a flock to reduce the risk of injury to the animals. Individuals involved in cockfighting, however, are intentionally holding more than five roosters per acre and violating legitimate breeding practices. In Montgomery County, the two most recent cases that resulted in convictions for cockfighting were at properties known by the Office of Animal Services to have more than 25 roosters for breeding.

Senate Bill 1055 would place a reasonable limit on the number of roosters a person can keep. The bill promotes healthy flock dynamics and is consistent with good animal husbandry practices. The Montgomery County Office of Animal Services urges the Committee to adopt a favorable report on SB 1055.

unfavorable HB 1055.pdf

Uploaded by: Peter DOrazio

Position: UNF

Hello
Environment and Transportation Committee,

Please oppose HB 1055

I grew up during communism in Romania and I remember my grandmother panicking about being fined or arrested for having more chickens than what was allowed. Government must stay out of farmers lives! Otherwise, you are no different than communism!

Please let the rooster be! Matter fact we need more roosters, chickens, and goats.

Thank you

Daniela DOrazio