

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 228

(Chair, Appropriations Committee)(By Request -
Departmental - Labor)

Appropriations

**Horse Racing - Prohibited Acts - Slaughter of Racehorses for Commercial
Purposes**

This departmental bill prohibits a person from (1) slaughtering or causing the slaughter of a racehorse in the State for certain commercial purposes and (2) purchasing, selling, transferring, offering for sale, importing into the State, or transporting a racehorse if the person knows or reasonably should know that the racehorse will be slaughtered for certain commercial purposes. A person who violates the provisions of the bill is guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to specified penalties on conviction. Fine revenue is distributed to the horse racing special fund. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Special fund revenues may increase beginning in FY 2027 depending on the number and amount of fines that are imposed and collected in any year. State expenditures are not directly affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: The Maryland Department of Labor has determined that this bill has minimal or no impact on small business (attached). The Department of Legislative Services concurs with this assessment.

Analysis

Bill Summary: An individual who violates the provisions of the bill is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to maximum penalties of a \$1,000 fine and/or

one year imprisonment for a first offense. For a second or subsequent offense, maximum penalties increase to a \$2,000 fine and/or one year imprisonment.

A corporation, partnership, or any other entity that violates the provisions of the bill is subject to a fine of up to \$2,500 for a first offense and \$5,000 for a second or subsequent offense.

If the Maryland Racing Commission (MRC) or the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) finds that a person has violated the provisions of the bill, MRC or MDA may revoke or suspend any license issued to the person by MRC or MDA.

MRC, in consultation with MDA, must adopt regulations to carry out the provisions of the bill.

The bill may not be construed to prohibit humane euthanasia of a racehorse by a licensed veterinarian for reasons unrelated to commercial purposes, including severe injury, maiming, or injury that results in no quality of life for the racehorse, as determined by a licensed veterinarian.

A racehorse is defined as a horse (1) bred or intended for racing, including a weanling, yearling, horse in training, or racehorse breeding stock with a record of having produced or sired offspring intended for racing or (2) that has been recorded on the backstretch of a track in the State, has had a recorded workout on a track in the State, or has participated in a race meeting in the State where pari-mutuel betting is allowed.

Current Law: The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service enforces the Federal Meat Inspection Act, which requires federal inspection and regulation of meat products prepared for distribution in interstate commerce for use as human food. The Maryland Wholesome Meat Act authorizes MDA to inspect establishments engaged in slaughtering of livestock or processing livestock carcasses, parts of them, meat, or meat food products capable of use as human food solely for intrastate commerce. MDA advises, however, that it has not inspected establishments since the early 1990s, when the department's inspection program ended for budgetary reasons and establishments were advised to seek federal authorization in order to continue operations.

The Maryland Wholesome Meat Act contains various prohibitions relating to livestock carcasses, meat food products, and labeling, including a prohibition against selling, donating, transporting, or offering or receiving for sale or transportation in intrastate commerce any equine carcass, part of it, or meat or meat food products of any equine, unless it is clearly identified to show the kind of animals from which it is derived. The prohibitions under the Act are subject to criminal penalties, including, for a first offense, imprisonment for up to six months and/or a fine of up to \$3,000.

Section 10-620 of the Criminal Law Article prohibits a person from (1) willfully and maliciously interfering with, injuring, destroying, or tampering with an equine used for racing or breeding; a competitive exhibition of skill, breed, or stamina; or any other lawful activity; (2) willfully starting, instigating, engaging in, or furthering an act that interferes with, injures, destroys, or tampers with an equine used for racing or breeding; a competitive exhibition of skill, breed, or stamina; or any other lawful activity; or (3) committing an act that tends to interfere with, injure, destroy, or tamper with an equine used for racing or breeding; a competitive exhibition of skill, breed, or stamina; or any other lawful activity.

A person who violates these provisions is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to a fine of up to \$1,000 and/or imprisonment of up to one year.

Background: MRC advises that the bill is intended to (1) improve the Maryland racing industry's reputation and integrity with the public regarding animal welfare; (2) support the responsible retirement of racehorses; and (3) enhance the humane treatment of Maryland racehorses. MRC reports that California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas have similar laws prohibiting the sales of racehorses for such commercial purposes.

State Revenues: Horse racing special fund revenues may increase beginning in fiscal 2027 depending on the number and amount of fines imposed and collected in a given year, which cannot be reliably estimated at this time.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: SB 231 (Chair, Budget and Taxation Committee)(By Request - Departmental - Labor) - Budget and Taxation.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Agriculture; Maryland Department of Labor; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - January 19, 2026
sj/jrb

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ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC IMPACT ON SMALL BUSINESSES

TITLE OF BILL: Horse Racing - Prohibited Acts - Slaughter of Racehorses for Commercial Purposes

BILL NUMBER: HB 228

PREPARED BY: Chris Merz

PART A. ECONOMIC IMPACT RATING

This agency estimates that the proposed bill:

X__ WILL HAVE MINIMAL OR NO ECONOMIC IMPACT ON MARYLAND
SMALL
BUSINESS

OR

__ WILL HAVE MEANINGFUL ECONOMIC IMPACT ON MARYLAND SMALL
BUSINESSES

PART B. ECONOMIC IMPACT ANALYSIS