



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

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January 29, 2020

Environment and Transportation Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for HB 13 Prohibition on Releasing a Balloon Into the Atmosphere

Dear Chairman Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and members of the Committee,

The Humane Society of the United States, representing our members and supporters in Maryland, strongly supports HB 13, legislation aimed at ending environmentally unsound balloon releases in Maryland.

While releasing a helium balloon into the atmosphere during a celebratory event or a solemn memorial may be visually pleasing, it is extremely detrimental to the environment and the pain and suffering experienced by animals as a result of these releases is staggering. Discarding a balloon into the atmosphere is simply littering. Once released, balloons can travel for hundreds of miles before they burst or deflate and become litter. Seabirds, sea turtles, seals and other marine mammals are injured or killed after ingesting or becoming entangled in balloons and their strings. Animals on land such as horses, cows, and other farm animals are also at risk.

Balloons are commonly made of latex or mylar materials and present a danger to animals who perceive them as food, or they may get caught in the ribbons attached to them, hindering their ability to move around and feed. For example, when balloons burst, they resemble jellyfish, the natural prey of sea turtles, and subsequently block their digestive track when ingested. Seabirds are at particular risk as a [recent study](#) found that balloons are the leading marine debris risk of mortality for seabirds.

Both the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) and the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#) warn against the practice. Even so-called 'biodegradable' balloons take years to break down in the environment. Therefore, wildlife and marine animals will continue to ingest them. A study found more than [18,000 balloons](#), strings, and other pieces were picked up along the Great Lakes shorelines in Detroit from 2016 to 2018.

Maryland's beaches, mountains, and fields are resources worthy of the greatest standards of protection. There are eco-friendly alternatives to balloon releases that are appropriate for celebratory or solemn events including lighting a candle, creating a charity fundraiser, planting a tree, or organizing a service day. As we become aware of the harmful implications of balloon releases, we need to change our behavior accordingly and ensure we are compassionate not only towards humans, but toward all living things.

It is important to note that there is a lot of momentum on this issue in Maryland. Frederick, Wicomico, and Queen Anne's County have already enacted bans. Maryland needs a statewide prohibition to be a leader on this issue, and to reinforce the need to end this harmful practice.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation. We respectfully urge the committee to advance HB 13.

Sincerely,

Emily Hovermale
Maryland and Delaware State Director