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Suite 102  
College Park, MD 20740

**Committee: Environment and Transportation**

**Testimony on: HB 13 – “Solid Waste Management - Prohibition on Releasing a Balloon into the Atmosphere”**

**Position: Support**

**Hearing Date: January 29, 2020**

The Maryland Sierra Club supports HB 13, a bill to prohibit the intentional release of balloons into the atmosphere. HB 13 is a simple, yet meaningful way to eliminate a source of harmful litter. Three Maryland counties have already passed similar, bipartisan legislation. A statewide ban makes sense given that once released, balloons may travel great distances before returning to Earth and thus are a type of litter that does not recognize county boundaries.

A bouquet of colorful balloons floating up into the blue sky can be a beautiful tribute to a loved one or a way to celebrate an important event. Unfortunately, these balloons eventually return to Earth as litter, tangled in trees, wrapped around bushes, or floating in waterways, sometimes many miles from where they were originally released.

In a research report funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, five states in the coastal northeast and mid-Atlantic recognized that balloons are a dangerous type of marine debris that deserve attention.<sup>1</sup> Balloons that end up in waterways pose a serious threat to birds and marine life. Much like plastic bags, when balloons float in the water turtles mistake them for jellyfish and accidentally ingest them. Balloons and their attached ribbons can be ingested and cause serious injury and death to birds and fish as well. Even on Assateague Island, where balloons are banned, National Park Service officials recently witnessed a wild horse choking on a balloon.<sup>2</sup>

We are pleased that HB 13 has bipartisan support in the General Assembly and hope its passage will encourage a wider conversation about the alarming problem of single-use plastic pollution.

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<sup>1</sup> Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean, *Assessment of Marine Debris in the Mid-Atlantic, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York and Virginia*, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Shawn Soper, *Assateague Horse Incident Highlights Balloon Dangers*, Ocean City Dispatch, May 29, 2019.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has approximately 800,000 members.