

February 24, 2020

Support HB 897 - Black Bear Damage Reimbursement Fund – Pets

Dear Chairman Barve and Esteemed Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

I am writing to you concerning House Bill 897 which directs Maryland DNR to pay Black Bear damages to land owners- taxpayers in the state of Maryland, who have had their 'Pets' attacked by aggressive bears and have vet bills to contend with. I speak from experience! I was walking around my garden with my 40 pound Sheltie next to me when a bear 10 feet from us in the brush aggressively growled and huffed at us. My dog was bred to protect and started barking and was immediately attacked by the bear. As I ran toward the house I looked back and saw my dog disappearing underneath a bear of approximately 250 pounds. I returned outside calling my dog who had been lifted over a 3 foot fence and had 5 bear bites on his spine and shoulders. He was covered in blood and bear saliva but I knew he needed medical attention as soon as possible. I lifted him over the fence without realizing at the time I had potentially exposed myself to rabies, as the bear saliva was all over my face and mouth. I took both dogs to our vet since they had made facial contact. One dog needed only a Rabies vaccine booster but the dog who had been attacked needed a Rabies booster and severe wound treatment. I was advised by my physician, the Garrett Co. Health Officer and the Maryland Health Officer to immediately start the Human 10 day Rabies vaccine for possible Rabies exposure from bear saliva. I contacted Mike Slattery from the DNR, Senator John Hafer and Delegate George Edwards. Physically and mentally, dealing with those Rabies shots was a true nightmare! Thankfully, my Garrett County elected officials were able to get the State of Maryland to pay my vet bills and the last \$1000 my insurance would not pay of the \$4600 I was charged for the Human Rabies Vaccine.

I was chosen to be on the Maryland Black Bear Task by Governor Glendening and we were able to revive Black Bear Hunting as a means of controlling the rising population of bears in Maryland. Over 70% of black bears harvested are from private land. I do not feel landowners- taxpayers should be forced to become black bear habitat against their will, when their children, their dear Pets, livestock, beehives, etc. are constantly in danger of being attacked. Many Pets are as close to landowners as their children. For this reason I would like to see House Bill 897 pass, so that Pet owners are fairly compensated for their Pet's physical damage and all vet bills connected to Maryland bear attacks.

Many pet owners will appreciate your help with the passing of Bill 897 for the state of Maryland to include 'Pets' along with livestock, beehives, chickens, etc. when Maryland Black Bears attack and cause physical damage resulting in costly vet bills.

I have been in contact with a single mother of two, who along with her son recently witness a night time, gruesome attack of their 'Pet' dog by two bears, on her property. This occurred after the same bears broke into her garage three days earlier, taking her dog's bagged food into the woods. Not only were Mother and son fearful for their own safety- on their property -in darkness, they had to retrieve their severely wounded dog and pay for emergency medical treatment for their dog, who in the end died. Unfortunately, this mother is now forced to pay a vet bill of \$500, for a DEAD loyal PET. So far, the State of Maryland has refused to compensate her for that vet bill. This woman needs that money for her children's college cost. Many landowners - taxpayers will appreciate you successfully getting House Bill 897 passed! Thank you for your attention to this serious matter.

Sincerely,

Margaret Gosnell

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