

Testimony in support of Senate Bill 286

From Claire Lacey, Folly Quarter Road, Ellicott City MD 21042
camelot108@gmail.com

I am testifying today in support of Senate Bill 286, Crimes Against Animals, Interference With Livestock,

We have over 100,000 horses in Maryland with an economic impact of \$2.1 Billion including \$78 million in tax revenue. More than 50% of households in Maryland contain a horse enthusiast and we are known internationally for our horse culture in this State (American Horse Council 2017 census).

It is the nature of our pastime that we are usually competent and self sufficient. We have to be able to read the smallest indicators from our horses and take care of them in whatever situations arise. We are also divided into several different styles of equestrianism and because of these factors we often lack a common voice in asking for what we need. The Maryland Horse Council works to help us in that and today I am speaking as an individual and as President of the My Lady's Manor Driving Club (the only American Driving Society affiliated club in Maryland) in support of MHCs position on this bill and in favor of SB286. I am an ADS listed instructor and a Carriage Association of America Certified Driver. I have spent over 40 years studying and sharing knowledge about horses- much of that advocating for their well being in their interactions with humans. I have competed successfully at high levels in several types of riding and also in driving horses. I have also been a large animal Vet Tech with experience in animal behavior, control and biosecurity. Drawing on my knowledge and experience I have provided information on safe practices and risk management of equines in public spaces to several jurisdictions in Maryland.

This bill is an important piece of legislation that offers protection and some peace of mind to those who are willing to share their love of animals with those who want to see them. It adds needed strength to their voice that when they say “No, do not touch the animal” it means NO. People often try to continue justifying it verbally with “animals like me”. That may be true but in that moment the handler has seen something that No is appropriate. Having an automatic “No” in place empowers good biosecurity practices. We need this bill.

Equestrians are supposed to be able to use the road and in quieter areas that still happens- especially where there are small farms amongst subdivision development. The neighbors usually like that farms keep some space open and green and enjoy seeing the horses. But there are those who think it fun to scare the horses when they are out on the roads. This creates risk of severe injury to rider, bystanders, damage to horse, equipment or properties. A driving horse may never accept driving again as it requires a higher level of trust. These days you will not be able to just fill in a hoof print on a lawn. You will more likely get a big bill from a landscaper and threat of a lawsuit. Prevention is better than cure. We need this bill.

Even an animal in a field needs this bill. Gates left open or fencing destroyed allowing animals out create public nuisance, danger to those driving cars, risk of severe injury to people and the animals themselves. I had gates opened several times when a developer I was leasing from was trying to “encourage” me to break a lease (if I had it resulted in immediate need to move plus substantial financial penalties). There are other reasons it happens but having this legislation in place may deter people from endangering the public with such actions. With no limits on Equine Liability in Maryland, even though we take all precautions as animal owners we are legally liable and vulnerable to losing

everything through legal action against us- and all because of someone else's actions. We need this bill.

I support free speech but all too often we see that speech degenerate into hatred, vehement words, insults and energy directed at the person *when the horse is in such proximity that it is difficult for them not to think it is directed at them*. Horses are acutely aware of energy around them. That proximity is a key issue as it creates considerable stress and uncertainty for the horse and can result in panic, rearing and bolting. As many equestrian events are now held on Public Land or in Public spaces this is a perfect storm for a serious accident to occur. We need this bill.

I sincerely hope this bill passes so we can continue to share our animals safely with those who want to enjoy them. I thank those who have sponsored it as it is much needed provision for public health and safety as well as the safety of our animals.