



## *Safe Skies Maryland*

Dedicated to a Sustainable Future

### **Maryland General Assembly 2021 SB 716- Prohibit Release of Balloons Position: Favorable**

**Safe Skies Maryland** is a statewide conservation initiative with an organizational membership representing a diverse and active body of citizens seeking to advance sustainability. We advocate for birds and other wildlife and their relationship with human quality of life. We respectfully submit this letter in support of SB 716.

**Helium balloons pollute everywhere**, because they are the only type of single-use item whose very use defines its intended goal—the intentional release of this item into the environment. When released, there can be no expectation of proper disposal, as they travel many miles into the atmosphere and up to thousands of miles from the point of release, often ending up in our coastal and marine environments as deadly marine debris. **If we were to design a method to spread hazardous trash as far and wide as possible, we would fill it with helium and release into the air.**

**Balloons are not biodegradable.** Balloons made from latex, Mylar, and foil contain elements of trees, plastic sheeting, and metals. It is important to note that while one of these types, latex, is marketed as a biodegradable product, the natural latex has chemicals, plasticizers, and artificial dyes that change its composition to become what we know of as a commercial balloon that is no longer biodegradable. Additionally, saltwater acts as a preservative, further inhibiting the decomposition of the chemical compounds in balloons and ensuring they remain deadly in the marine environment for long periods of time.

**Balloons are a human hazard and a waste of valuable helium.** It is not uncommon for balloons to ensnare and impact power lines, where they can cause fires and power outages. And, the non-renewable element of helium can be better conserved for its vital use in medical life-saving equipment such as MRIs and Spectrometers.

**Balloons are the most hazardous form of trash to wildlife.** Latex balloons are the most common form of balloon found in the stomachs of deceased animals. Because balloons float on the currents, where so many marine animals look for food, they are deadly to the entire marine ecosystem. This includes marine mammals, sea turtles, sea birds, and a host of other fish and invertebrates **who actively select to consume this trash**, because they cannot distinguish a food item like jellyfish or squid from floating balloon fragments. Studies have shown that unlike hard plastics, these soft plastics can be deadly upon one incidence of ingestion, as the material conforms to internal organs, cause gastrointestinal



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blockages, is not passed through the body like hard plastics, and can cause the animal to starve. In one recently published study, researchers called **balloons, “the highest-risk debris item; 32 times more likely to result in death than ingesting hard plastic.”** (Roman, et al. 2018. A quantitative analysis linking seabird mortality and marine debris ingestion. Scientific Reports.) This current study supports similar prior findings in sea turtles. In addition to ingestion, entanglement in the items used to tether balloons prior to release, like strings and ribbons, create more opportunity for these wayward items to become deadly pollutants, as it is estimated that upwards of 100,000 marine animals annually become entangled and die as a result of being prevented from traveling and feeding normally.

**We are drowning in trash.** Communities everywhere are confronted with the realities of too much trash in the environment, in landfills, not enough of the trash produced being recycled, and there is the sad reality of huge floating islands of garbage in our oceans. Simply put, we are all living with too much trash. One of the deadliest and farthest traveling forms of this trash comes from the intentional release of balloons. What takes mere seconds to do creates an ongoing trail of damage, destruction, and death for which the environmental toll has been costly. The solution is both reasonable and responsible. It can no longer be argued that the intentional release of trash into the environment is acceptable given all that we know now and the hope we all have to save of our natural world. For so many reasons, we support the intended outcome of this welcomed legislative effort.

We thank the you for its consideration of this bill and respectfully ask for its passage.

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Safe Skies Maryland