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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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The Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

SB 716 Solid Waste Management – Prohibition on Releasing a Balloon Into the Atmosphere

Statement of Support by Bill Sponsor Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Thank you Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee for the opportunity to respectfully ask for your support of Senate Bill 716 Solid Waste Management – Prohibition on Releasing a Balloon Into the Atmosphere. This bill simply prohibits, with specified exceptions, a “person” from knowingly and intentionally releasing, or causing or organizing the release of, a balloon into the atmosphere.

I had the opportunity to present this legislation with my Senate colleagues, Senators Clarence Lam and Steve Hershey last session. This is the same bill that this Committee and the full Senate approved last session but did not make final passage due to the early COVID-19 session adjournment. The cross-filed House Bill 391, sponsored by Delegate Wayne Hartman, passed the House of Delegates on February 16, 2021 with bipartisan support by a vote of 94 to 34.

Once again this year, this balloon release prohibition legislation has broad support including the Maryland Coastal Bays Foundation, the Assateague Coastal Trust, the Assateague Island Alliance, the Queen Anne’s Conservation Association, the Humane Society, the Maryland Farm Bureau, the National Aquarium, the Maryland Zoo, and the Greater Ocean City and Salisbury Chambers of Commerce.

My constituent, Ocean Pines Chamber of Commerce Director Kerrie Jones Bunting, caught wind of the actions to mitigate balloon pollution in Queen Anne’s County and brought that to my attention and also to Delegate Hartman who represents Ocean City. Due to Ms. Bunting’s leadership, she involved several local community and environmental organizations including the Ocean City Surf Club, of which I am a member. During our “Adopt a Beach” outings, I personally can attest to pieces of balloon that I have picked up during our volunteer beach clean ups.

I also would like to highlight the extraordinary work of another constituent, Nancy Gaither, the President of the Assateague Island Alliance. This local organization educates on ways to protect horses and other wildlife, and to preserve their nature and health. As noted in Ms. Gaither’s testimony, “horses have been seen to ingest balloons, which is beyond troubling, and, of course, the balloons wreak havoc with sea animals.”

The purpose of Senate Bill 716 is to educate individuals on the harmful effects that balloons have on our environment including killing wildlife, causing power outages, and polluting our trees and waterways. It does include a civil penalty of no more than \$250 for those who intentionally release balloons into the environment. I urge my colleagues and committee members to pass this common-sense and bipartisan legislation to protect our birds, sea-life, and of course, our beloved Assateague ponies.

My panel includes Jay Falstad with Queen Anne's Conservation Association who will explain the origins of this bill, Kerrie Bunting with the Ocean Pines Chamber of Commerce, and Ferrell Santacroce-Beachler, a constituent who is an active member of the Humane Society. All witnesses will highlight the necessity of this legislation to protect our wildlife in the great State of Maryland.

I respectfully ask my colleagues on the Senate Educational, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee for a favorable report of Senate Bill 716.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

