



# Ocean City Surf Club

*Celebrating the heritage and future  
of our ocean community*

## SENATE BILL 716

The Ocean City Surf Club is an environmental nonprofit 501(c) 3 dedicated to protecting and preserving our natural resources for future generations. OCSC believes in the conservation and collaborative stewardship of our shared natural heritage: the public lands and waterways and all that make Maryland's great outdoors priceless. We need policies and investments that will strengthen protection of our natural resources and wildlife.

Our Adopt Your Beach program gives passionate volunteers the tools to lead independent cleanups, collection of critical marine debris data and to actively participate in protecting what we love. Over the last four (4) years, our volunteers have picked up over 3500 balloons and strings on the beaches of Ocean City and Assateague Island. Even so-called 'biodegradable' balloons take years to break down in the environment. Therefore, wildlife and marine animals will continue to ingest them.

As someone who was raised on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, it saddens me to see how much more trash litters our beaches now as compared to when I was little and playing on the dunes of Ocean City. I believe this bill serves as an opportunity to decrease one of the most harmful types of marine debris and will help protect our wildlife from ingesting balloon fragments.

I have picked up so many pieces of balloon debris on our beaches that all I can do is shake my head with disbelief. It is heartbreaking to witness the realities of these issues firsthand while also doing my best to help where I can. It is important that everyone realize the magnitude of this very evident problem in our community. While releasing a helium balloon into the atmosphere during a celebration or a solemn memorial may be visually pleasing, it is extremely detrimental to the environment. The pain and suffering experienced by animals because of these releases is staggering. Discarding a balloon into the atmosphere is simply littering. Once released, balloons can travel for hundreds of miles before they burst or deflate and become dangerous litter. Seabirds, sea turtles, seals and other marine mammals are injured or killed after ingesting or becoming entangled in balloons and their strings. We have all seen the pictures online of our beautiful, wild Assateague ponies with balloon strings hanging out of their mouths.

Our unparalleled coastline, fields, and waterways are resources worthy of the greatest standards of protection. There are ecofriendly alternatives to balloon releases that are appropriate for celebratory or solemn events including lighting a candle, creating a charity fundraiser, planting a tree, or organizing a service day. As we become aware of the harmful implications of balloon releases, we need to change our behavior accordingly and ensure we are compassionate not only towards humans, but toward all living things. We sincerely hope you recognize the need for everyone to be as 'green' as we possibly can be to protect our beautiful state.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

Effie Cox

Ocean City Surf Club Environmental Chairperson  
Ocean City Surf Club Environmental Scholarship Chairperson  
Town of Ocean City Environmental Legislative Committee member  
Adopt Your Beach Coordinator

**Facebook.com/oceancitysurfclub**  
**oceancitysurfclub.com**      **oceancitysurfclub.org**

**PO Box 4752 • Ocean City MD 21843 • Email: [info@oceancitysurfclub.org](mailto:info@oceancitysurfclub.org)**



Photo courtesy Penny Sperry



Photo courtesy Karen Lockard

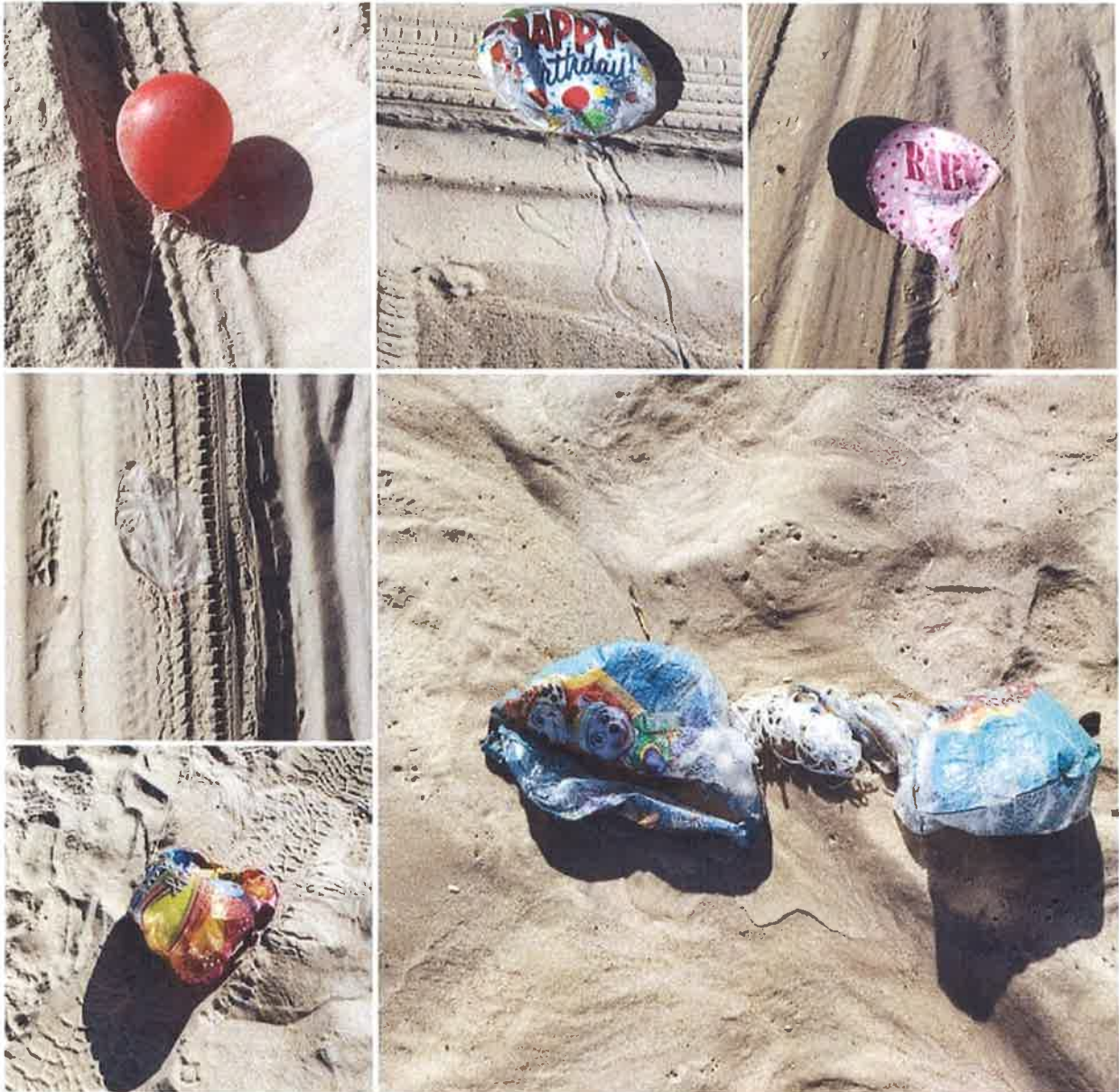


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