



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL**  
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

**TOM HUCKER**  
Councilmember

Member, Public Safety Committee  
Chair, Transportation & Environment Committee

February 22, 2021

The Honorable Paul Pinsky  
Chair of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building  
2 West  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

I am writing to you to express my support for SB 716. This bill will help reduce trash pollution and is one of the many critically important steps we must take to maintain a more healthy and sustainable environment.

Last September, I passed Bill 6-20 which bans the intentional release of balloons in Montgomery County. My legislation was supported unanimously by my colleagues, as well as numerous environmental and animal welfare groups. Now, it's important we pass similar State legislation.

I was surprised how common the mass outdoor releases of latex or mylar balloons continues to be. These balloons are used to celebrate all kinds of events such as weddings, graduations, birthdays, and more. However, the problem is when these balloons come down, locally or sometimes hundreds of miles away, they end up in the mouths and digestive tracts of all kinds of animals, from sea turtles and marine birds to the wild horses on Assateague Island. Balloons are the deadliest form of marine debris for seabirds. Balloons are often mistaken for prey and ingested by animals, and the animals also get entangled in their ribbons which can lead to death as well.

Releasing balloons are hazardous to wildlife and it is time to end planned littering. Other jurisdictions have passed similar legislation including Queen Anne's County, Ocean City, California and Virginia. It's time for the state of Maryland to pass legislation.

I respectfully suggest the committee consider two amendments, however, my support is not contingent upon these changes.

1. The definition of balloon. The Montgomery County language states: Balloon means an inflatable object: (A) manufactured from plastic, latex, rubber, or mylar; and (B) inflated with a gas that is lighter than air, such as helium. The current language in SB 716 is unclear and includes unfilled balloons.
2. The definition of an 'instance' of a balloon release. The Montgomery County language states: Each release of 50 or fewer balloons at one time is a separate civil violation. That way an individual or organization releasing 500 balloons would receive a stronger penalty than someone releasing only 1. This language was used in the recently passed Montgomery County law, and including it here would create consistency with that recent reform.

Lastly, we have done our part to keep balloons out of our waterways and away from our wildlife. Now, it is up to the State to promote a sustainable and healthy environment by prohibiting the release of balloons into the atmosphere. I respectfully urge the committee to give this bill a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Hucker", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tom Hucker  
Councilmember  
Montgomery County Council