



MARYLAND
HORSE
COUNCIL

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One Common Bond: The Horse
One Common Voice: The Horse Council

Testimony of the Maryland Horse Council on SB 791

Natural Resources – Land Conservation – Establishment of Goals and Programs (Maryland the Beautiful Act) – **FAVORABLE**

The Maryland Horse Council (MHC) is a membership-based trade association that represents the state-wide horse industry in Maryland. Our members include horse farms; horse related businesses; equestrian competitors; trainers; individual enthusiasts; equine-assisted therapy programs; and breed, interest, and discipline associations. We represent over 30,000 Marylanders who make their living with horses, or who just own and love them.

The horse industry overall has a \$2.4 billion impact on Maryland. There are twice as many horses per square mile in Maryland than there are in Virginia, Kentucky, California, or Texas. The Maryland horse industry generates over \$89 million in tax revenue every year and supports at least 28,000 industry jobs. Equine enthusiasts spend over \$1 billion a year on their passion.

Conservation Goals and Land Trust Funding: MHC supports SB 791 because conserved open space is critically important to our industry. Horse farms comprise 10 percent of all land in Maryland and 25 percent of the state's total agricultural land. Of the approximately 705,000 acres in horse farms, 88,000 of them are in permanent preservation.

Horse farms are, in turn, critically important to the State's efforts to mitigate the worst effects of climate change. Well-maintained pastures are second only to healthy forest with respect to nutrient run-off control, carbon fixing, and water filtration. A properly managed pasture retains at least 70 percent of its groundcover year-round, unlike croplands which lie fallow part of the time and have no stabilizing roots to hold the topsoil in place, unless the farmer elects to plant cover crops.¹

¹ See Rebecca C. Bott, et al. *Production and Environmental Implications of Equine Grazing*, JOURNAL OF EQUINE VETERINARY SCIENCE 33 (2013): 1032.



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As a result, SB 791's overall goal of preserving 40 percent of all land in Maryland by 2040 will benefit the horse industry immensely, and we are in favor of any support the State can offer those of our local land trusts that otherwise have difficulty accessing open space preservation funds.

Greenspace Equity Goals: MHC also supports SB 791 because our industry is committed to expanding outdoor recreational opportunities to all populations of Marylanders, including low-income Marylanders, those who lack access to a car, and Marylanders with disabilities.

The proposed Greenspace Equity Board mission to increase community greenspaces in underserved areas, including greenspaces that comprise trails, dovetails nicely with our industry's equity goals. Most riders are recreational trail riders, and recreational trail riding alone supports ~5,000 jobs and adds \$268 million in value to the State's economy. The total economic impact of recreational riding in Maryland is \$438 million in 2022 dollars.

Giving more Marylanders the opportunity to engage in recreational trail riding will benefit our industry, the health and welfare of Marylanders, and the state coffers, all at the same time.

We urge the committee to give SB 791 a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL

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