

SB 679 Fair Hill Funding -- FAVORABLE.pdf

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P.O. Box 606 | Lisbon, Maryland 21797
www.mdhorsecouncil.org

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

Testimony of the Maryland Horse Council on SB 679

Fair Hill Improvement Fund – Special Events Area and Operations – **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.

MHC supports SB 679 because the Fair Hill Special Event Area hosts one of the most prestigious equestrian events in the world – the Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill – which event requires regular capital investment to ensure the safety of both horse and rider, as well as the comfort and enjoyment of tens of thousands of spectators.

The horse industry overall has a \$2.4 billion impact on Maryland. The equestrian competition sector alone supports over 3,340 jobs in Maryland and has a \$310 million economic impact on the state's economy.

The Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill is the highest level of international competition in the equestrian sport of eventing. Eventing is an equestrian triathlon that takes place over three days, where each horse and rider pair must participate in competitions in dressage, cross country, and show jumping, each of which takes place on different days. Eventing is one of only two Olympic sports where men and women compete alongside one another as equals, the other being the Nacre 17 sailing event.

The sport grew out of the rigors of cavalry training. A 5* event is the most difficult level of competition, more difficult than the Olympics or the Pan Am Games, and the demands of a 5* are such that there are only 7 such competitions in the world. The inaugural Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill was held just last year and attracted horses and riders from 7 countries as well as more than 20,000 spectators, even in the midst of the COVID pandemic.



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Maintaining a world class venue for such a prestigious athletic competition does not come cheap. The dressage and show jumping arenas require special footing to keep horses from injuring the tendons and ligaments in their legs. The turf on the cross country course must be maintained such that it is neither too soft nor too hard, too dry nor too wet, too bumpy nor too slick. The cross country obstacles themselves must meet the stringent safety requirements of the International Federation of Equestrian Sports.

The Federation also requires that the stalls at the barns be of certain dimensions, and that there be treatment stalls, testing stalls, and isolation stalls. Eventing venues must follow strict and comprehensive biosecurity protocols to prevent the transmission of communicable equine diseases. The barns and stalls must be supervised 24 hours a day by competition stewards.

In addition, hosting a 5* requires the local jurisdiction to provide first responders, police support, traffic and parking support, and fire department personnel, as well as accommodations for the several hundred competitors and their staffs and the several thousand spectators, such as seating, refreshments, and rest rooms.

An investment of \$1.8 million a year to support one of the most prestigious events on the international equestrian calendar in a sport that has a \$310 million impact a year on Maryland's economy is a reasonable and appropriate use of state funds.

Respectfully submitted,

THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL

(844) MDHORSE (844-634-6773)

Info@mdhorsecouncil.org