



Riding to a Different Beat

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All breeds, gaits, riding styles and experience are welcome

Reference: **Somerset County Sunday Hunting SB 98** to allow Hunting of all species and all seasons on all Sundays of the year

To: The Senate Committee on Environment, Health and Education

CC: Somerset County Delegation

Hearing Date: Wednesday, March 9, 2022, submitted Tuesday March 8, 2022

I am writing to you on behalf of our 300+ family state-wide memberships. We are all trail riders, and we ride throughout Maryland, including Somerset County. I am a gaited horsemanship instructor; and also teach trail etiquette, trail safety and trail horsemanship. Trail riding is a skill to be developed, and a good trail horse is a well trained animal. I am retired from 15 years with TROTSAR, Mounted (human) Search and Rescue (on horseback), with whom I was an evaluator and certified search technician

Sunday Hunting was first introduced in the 1990's when the deer population was so great it needed strong management to reduce the herds.. That is no longer the case as the numbers have dropped and is being managed so not to get too low. The hunting world is now looking to expand their weekend opportunities as recreational. This has been a long standing battle between the 3% or less hunting population and the rest of Marylanders who wish to enjoy our beautiful Maryland outdoors. This is not an anti-hunting campaign; it has always been about equitable, shared safe use of the woods, trails and fields by all. Non-horse property owners also call for one quiet day of the weekend to enjoy their own backyards without hunting around them.

Those in favor of SB 98 say they need more time on weekends to hunt because they work, plus have family and community obligations. Well, so do the majority of other Marylanders. Our Club members and other trail riders also work, so the weekend is when they can spend quality time with their horses and families. Over the years, our Club along with other trail groups, scheduled their organized trail rides during traditional hunting seasons on Sunday to avoid any conflict. As the number of Sundays to be hunted has increased with the passage of more bills, that has become more difficult to do.

Horse Boarding facilities thrive on safe access to trails around and from their facility for their clientele. Not every horse rider owns a trailer, so they do not have the option to take their horse away from home or their boarding facility to ride "safe" public lands. Many public parks are not fully safe because many of the trails run adjacent to or across private property fields and easements that can be hunted.

I recently shared my experiences with disrespectful hunters who endangered our lives upon request from the House Committee on Environment and Transportation:

- 1- My neighbor's bedroom window was shattered by a poacher hunting at night in our hayfield adjacent to our houses, my horse pasture and barn. The trespasser ran/drove away before anyone could catch him.
- 2- A group from the Chesapeake Club were fired on purposely while riding on the C&O Canal Towpath. The hunters were in a private field across the road from the towpath. We alerted them to our approach, they stopped firing momentarily, and then fired over our heads into the National Park as we rode abreast of them. I called the local police to report and gain us safe passage, but no one responded.
- 3- The first mission my Search and Rescue Team was on after I became an active member was to locate a hunter who had not arrived back home. He was found passed out at the bottom of a tree surrounded by beer cans because he had neglected to secure himself in his tree stand.

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The Chesapeake Plantation Walking Horse Club invites enthusiasts of all breeds and riding disciplines to join in our fun. Membership benefits include Newsletters with Classifieds * Free Monthly Trail Rides * Friendly Help * Parties * Camping * Clinics * Parades * Demonstrations * Good Friends * and whatever our members want to plan to do. Membership is required for most Club events, and runs for a full year from the time you join.

Proud supporting member of Maryland Horse Council (MHC) and Friends of the Sound Horse (FOSH)



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There are so many more stories to be told of similar instances and even horses injured and killed while grazing in their own fields. Those in favor of the bill may argue that is not true and there is a lack of documented reports. The discrepancy exists because many of these occurrences are not reported, or in my case, not recorded. Or they are reported to local police departments because they occurred on private property, backyards, farm fields, and horse pastures.

The fear is not just about being shot. It is about these run-ins with hunters. Besides our own personal discomfort, the horse is a flight animal. So when they are frightened, their natural instinct is to run, which further endangers the rider or handler. Whether the fear is real or perceived, it does keep folks from venturing out and enjoying their past-times. Would you want to take your grandchildren for a walk in the woods if there might be hunting going on — with this bill and the current mish-mash of possible Sundays to be hunted across the State, you might not even know it until it is too late!

Safe, reliable trail horses are not just born. Like any athlete, it takes aptitude, conditioning and years of training on the trail. Rider skills are developed as well through hours of practice on the trail. Competitive challenges like endurance riding require hours every week to develop and maintain the horse and rider's competitive edge. With this bill allowing hunting on all 365 days of the year, how will we be able to develop our safe trail horses and sensible trail riders.

Unfortunately, due to covid and health concerns, the Maryland Horse Industry Board (MHIB) and its sponsors will not be holding our annual Maryland Horse Legislative Day again this year in Annapolis. In lieu of that, I believe you have all received a video from the MHIB depicting the richness of Maryland's equine community and its \$2.1 billion impact on our State's economy. In case you missed it, here is the link [Maryland Horse Industry Day 2022 - YouTube](#)

I suspect many of you have not had the opportunity to take a trail ride on horseback. Here is another link so you can ride along with a few of my Chesapeake friends to experience the peace and tranquility that we wish so desperately to protect: https://youtu.be/Q3GYMy_mnAY

SB 98 proposes to make all Sundays of the year open to hunting by including all species and seasons. This means all seven days of the week, 52 weeks and all 365 days of the year can be hunted. If you allow this to go through, when can the rest of us enjoy our Maryland Outdoors (or even our own backyard)?

Please, vote no for SB 98 and save Sundays for the 97% of Maryland's population who do not have hunting licenses. I take my request a step further, please consider all the testimonies opposing hunting on Sundays when other bills come before you to expand these hunting days and opportunities for such a small percentage of Maryland citizens.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter of equitable, shared use of our great Maryland outdoors. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if I can be of any further assistance to you.

Respectfully Submitted,

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