



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 HB 156

### Local Governments – Urban Agricultural Incentive Zones – Authorization – **SUPPORT**

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The Maryland Horse Council (MHC) is the trade association for all sectors of the horse industry in Maryland. Our membership includes horse farms, horse related businesses, individual enthusiasts, and breed, interest and discipline associations. As such, we represent over 30,000 Marylanders who make their living with horses, or just own and love them. MHC applauds the sponsors of HB 156 for bringing attention to the opportunities for urban agriculture.

Horses are an important part of Maryland's agriculture industry because there are more horses in Maryland (>100,000) than there are beef cattle (45,000), dairy cows (42,000), and goats (13,111) combined. There are more horses in Maryland than there are sheep (23,399), hogs (18,500), alpacas (1,660), or bison (43).<sup>1</sup> Maryland's equine industry has a \$2.7 billion dollar impact on the state's economy.<sup>2</sup>

There are horses in every county and in every urban area. One of the most well-known urban equine institutions is the Baltimore City Arabbers, who sell produce from horse drawn carts on the city streets. Arabbers were at one time a fixture in every urban area, but the Arabbers in Baltimore City are the only group of working Arabbers left in the country. These are minority owned business that provide needed services to food deserts and other under-served areas of the city. Designated urban agricultural incentive zones could open new doors for the Arabbers to sustain and grow their urban produce trade.

Designated urban agricultural incentives could also benefit recreational equine operations in urban areas. Equine operations in urban areas often cater to populations that do not typically have access to horses, to horse farms, or to agricultural or rural life in general. The City Ranch in Baltimore and Wheaton Park Stables in Montgomery County are two examples.

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<sup>1</sup> See MARYLAND AT A GLANCE: AGRICULTURE, at <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/01glance/html/agri>.

<sup>2</sup> Valued in 2022 dollars.



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City Ranch's mission is to help redirect urban youth away from violence by offering opportunities to foster personal growth through working with animals. Similarly, Wheaton Park Stables offers summer camps for children within walking distance of the most densely populated section of Montgomery County, and their programs are often the first exposure to livestock farms and large animals that their students have ever had. Wheaton Park Stables also offer therapeutic programs and employment opportunities for veterans and those with special needs.

Both City Ranch and Wheaton Park Stables have waiting lists for their summer camps and lesson programs. And both operations need significant capital investments to maintain their facilities. Urban agricultural incentives could benefit each operation immensely.

MHC is excited about the opportunities urban agriculture incentives could bring to the equine industry, and we look forward to working with local jurisdictions to create urban agricultural zones to support Maryland's most popular livestock – horses.

We urge the committee to give HB 156 a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

**THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL**

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