



One Common Bond | The Horse
One Common Voice | The Maryland Horse Council

Testimony of the Maryland Horse Council on HB 727

Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors 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.

MHC supports HB 727 because most riders are recreational riders, and most recreational riders use Maryland's extensive network of multi-use trails.

The horse industry overall has a \$2.4 billion impact on Maryland. Recreational 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.

We applaud the sponsors for so rapidly taking steps to implement the recommendations of the State Park Investment Commission. Our industry is committed to expanding equine recreational opportunities that are adequately accessible to all populations of Marylanders, including low-income Marylanders, those who lack access to a car, and Marylanders with disabilities. We also applaud Governor Hogan for creating the Office Outdoor Recreation (ORR) to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities and the economic benefits they produce.

Every component of HB 727 will benefit the horse industry, but in particular:

- The new Volunteer Management Program will solve a major challenge that has faced our recreational riders through the years. Trail riding groups are ready, willing, and eager to volunteer for trail maintenance work, but they are often unable effectively to work through the current system for getting approved as a volunteer organization. In addition, trail riding organizations have faced challenges with respect to the mandatory chainsaw training. Taken together, it has been difficult, if not impossible, for trail riders



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to clear logs and trees that block trails after a storm, or to trim trees to a level sufficiently high to permit riders to pass without getting hit by over-hanging limbs. A coordinated volunteer program dedicated to promoting volunteer opportunities and conducting training will be an immense help.

- The \$80 million Park System Critical Maintenance Fund is essential to repair trails that have eroded, that have large holes, and that have otherwise degraded to the point of being unsafe for users.
- The \$70 million Park System Capital Improvement & Acquisitions Fund is essential to improving the carbon capture capacity of our parks through flood barriers and forest buffers, for improving and expanding multi-use trails, and for acquiring new public land to relieve overcrowding.

Thank you again for sponsoring this important and potentially game changing legislation. We urge the committee to give it a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL
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