



MARYLAND
HORSE
COUNCIL

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

In the Senate Education, Energy & the Environment Committee, March 8, 2023

Testimony of the Maryland Horse Council on SB 777

Middle Shore Counties – Sunday Hunting – Repeal of Time Restrictions - UNFAVORABLE

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- ❖ **A majority of Marylanders oppose Sunday hunting.** An independent statewide poll conducted by Gonzales Research and Media Services in 2018 found that 68.9% of respondents oppose Sunday hunting. Even DNR’s own 2018 commissioned survey found that a majority of the general population does not favor Sunday hunting and does not want to see it expanded.¹
 - ❖ **This bill would allow all day Sunday hunting in Caroline County, Dorchester County, Talbot County, and Wicomico County for many months of the year.**
 - ❖ **This bill upends a compromise solution that many hoped would bring this issue, which has consumed much of this Committee’s time for many years, to a final closure that gave everyone a little bit of what they wanted. It seeks to strip recreational users of their only right to quiet and safe enjoyment of the outdoors on one - partial - day of the week.**
 - ❖ **This bill would infringe on the rights of the general public to enjoy outdoor recreation, the importance of which has received increased attention, including the new Office of Outdoor Recreation in DNR, and the passage last year of the Great Maryland Outdoors Act. 78% of the Gonzales poll respondents said they would decide to alter their recreational plans to avoid hunters. In a Maryland Horse Council 2016 poll, 85% of respondents said they changed their schedules or riding locations to avoid encountering hunters. The majority of Maryland’s equestrians are trail riders.**
 - ❖ **Since the advent of the pandemic, widespread use of outdoor recreation and natural resources by the general public has only increased.** For example, attendance at

¹ https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Documents/2018_DeerPublicOpinionSurvey.pdf

Maryland State Parks in 2020 increased 45% over 2019, which was also a record year.² Demand has remained strong. **Many of these new users are unfamiliar with the rules of hunting and hunting seasons, including the distinctions between public and private lands. Now is not the time to increase general public exposure to possible hunting risks or to further deter the public from outdoor recreation. We have separately submitted with this testimony a report of hunting incidents from 2007 - 2021, compiled from DNR's own data.**

- ❖ **The Maryland horse industry represents \$2.1 billion in economic impact; 28,000 jobs; \$1 billion in annual spending by participants; \$78 million in tax revenue. There are over 100,000 horses in Maryland (more per square mile than any state in the Union), and 51.8% of Maryland households contain horse enthusiasts.³ There are horses in every county in the state. The majority of Maryland riders are trail riders.⁴**

The Maryland Horse Council (MHC) is a membership-based, umbrella trade association of the entire horse industry in Maryland. Our membership includes breed, interest and discipline associations, plus horse farms and stables, horse-related businesses, and horse owners representing all facets of the Maryland equestrian community, from the owners of race horses and race tracks, to the owners of international level competition horses, local sport horses, trail horses or just beloved retired companion horses. The owner of Pimlico, Laurel and Rosecroft racetracks is a member, as are vets, tack stores, and other farms, businesses and enthusiasts throughout the state. Every Maryland county, without exception, is home to hundreds to thousands of horses. (See attached fact sheet.) There are more horse per square mile in Maryland than in any state in the Union. (See attached fact sheet.)

The horse industry in Maryland is a large, engaged and thriving constituency, and a strong economic engine: 28,000 direct equine related jobs; 16,000 properties occupying over 705,000 acres (almost 10% of Maryland's total land area, and over 25% of Maryland's agricultural land) The industry represents \$2.1 billion in annual economic impact, generating \$78 million in annual tax revenue. Horse industry participants spend \$1 billion dollars annually (compare that to the \$260 million annual figure for hunters cited in the Fiscal and Policy Notes of other Sunday hunting bills). Thus, legislative actions that affect the equine industry have a broad economic effect.

POSITION

The Horse Council opposes SB 777.

BACKGROUND

For over 20 years, the Maryland Horse Council has worked to ensure fair use of shared natural resources during hunting season, by seeking to preserve Sundays as the one day of the week when children and adults who are hikers, birdwatchers, dog walkers, trail riders and other outdoor enthusiasts could enjoy the outdoors without concern for adverse interactions with hunters. Almost 20 years ago, we helped defeat a number of statewide Sunday hunting bills.

² <https://news.maryland.gov/dnr/2021/02/04/lt-governor-boyd-k-rutherford-maryland-department-of-natural-resources-announce-45-percent-increase-in-maryland-state-parks-attendance-in-2020/>

³ See attached fact sheet.

⁴ <http://equiery.com/trail-riding-tops-reader-survey/>

Proponents of Sunday hunting then changed tactics, seeking to introduce Sunday hunting on a county-by-county basis, which we also opposed vigorously. Sometimes they were successful; sometimes not. When they were successful, they succeeded in making an already complicated situation more complicated, making it more difficult for others to plan their outings, and for Natural Resources Police to effectively crack down on poachers and irresponsible hunters, which has caused even more negative encounters between irresponsible hunters and other users.⁵

Beginning in 2016, MHC proposed reasonable compromises that would still allow fair use of shared natural resources, by cutting off Sunday hunting, where allowed, at 10:30 am. This compromise still gives hunters, trail riders and others plenty of Sunday access to opportunities. This compromise was embraced by some legislators, who have praised the Horse Council for this reasonable approach. In recent years, it was adopted by Montgomery, Kent and Wicomico Counties.

Last year, bills were introduced that would have allowed all-day Sunday hunting for all species in all seasons (thus for many months out of the year) in Calvert, Charles, Caroline, Queen Anne's and Somerset Counties, as well as Talbot County for deer hunting from the first Sunday in October through the second Sunday in January, plus all five Sundays of the Spring (April-May) turkey season. Just two legislative days before the end of the session, the bills were amended, passed and sent to the Governor. The amendments essentially preserved any full day Sundays that each county already had, and required that any additional Sunday hunting must end at 10:30 am, except that Calvert, Caroline, Charles and Queen Anne's also were permitted to add full Sundays during the Spring turkey season. There were a few additional tweaks: in a last minute floor amendment, Dorchester County was added to the Queen Anne's and Caroline bill on the same terms. The Talbot County bill was amended to allow hunting until 10:30 on all Sundays in each of the deer seasons, except for two full Sundays in the firearms season and five full Sundays in the bow season (which they already had). Talbot had requested full day Sundays in the Spring turkey season, but got them only until 10:30. With these amendments, Senator Pinsky and the Committee sent a strong signal that this issue should be put to bed, with a compromise that gave everyone a little bit of what they wanted.

This bill attempts to roll back those compromises, and to strip recreational users of their only right to quiet and safe enjoyment of the outdoors on one - partial - day of the week. The bill would allow all day Sunday hunting for all species in Caroline and Dorchester, for all deer seasons in Talbot, for deer firearms in Wicomico, and for Spring turkey in Talbot. This bill does nothing to improve the situation for Natural Resources Police and continues to infringe on the fair rights of other users of our shared natural resources in Maryland.

The issue of recreational Sunday hunting is certainly a fraught one. In a November 2018 independent Gonzales statewide poll, the vast majority of respondents opposed Sunday hunting:

SUNDAY HUNTING Oppose 68.9%; Favor 21.9%

Breakdown:

⁵ In a 2016 Maryland Horse Council survey, 35% of respondents reported "adverse incidents" with hunters while trail riding, ranging from rudeness to deliberate attempts to spook horses, threatening with firearms, and firing of "warning" shots. Significant percentages of DNR's survey respondents also reported problems when encountering hunters.

Strongly Favor 13.5%
Somewhat Favor 8.4%
Somewhat Oppose 15.4%
Strongly Oppose 53.5%

These majorities opposed to Sunday hunting are true in Baltimore Metro, Washington Metro AND Rural areas. Rural Maryland opposed Sunday hunting 60.5% vs 34.1% in favor. Even DNR's own commissioned survey found that a majority of the general population does not favor Sunday hunting and does not want to see it expanded. (See footnote 1.) This bill directly contravenes that clear public opinion.

It is important to make clear that MHC is not opposed to hunting. Many of our members are hunters of deer, other game mammals and game birds. We just want to ensure that everyone has a safe option for enjoyment of the outdoors. The COVID pandemic has dramatically increased the level of outdoor activity and use of natural resources. According to DNR, 2020 State Park attendance increased by 45% to 21.5 million visitors. Demand has remained strong. In 2021, **Lt. Governor Rutherford stated: "With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic changing the way we live, work, and play, more and more Marylanders are finding affordable, socially-distant, and family-friendly recreation opportunities at our parks and public lands,"** (See footnote 2.) Many of these new users are unfamiliar with the rules of hunting and hunting seasons, and are unaware that they may encounter hunters in the woods. Now is not the time to roll the dice and increase the chances of potential adverse interactions between hunters and members of the public who are relatively new to the outdoors..

It is also sometimes argued that recreational hunters need Sundays because they have other things to do on Saturdays - a situation that plainly applies to most of Maryland's families who use outdoor resources, be they hunters, birdwatchers, dog walkers, mountain bikers, off-road vehicle enthusiasts and trail riders. So why should one group get special consideration? Where is the balancing of the public good, the equitable access? The number of licensed hunters in Maryland, about 100,000, is less than 2% of the state's population of about 6 million. The number of licensed resident hunters is reportedly ninth lowest among all the states.⁶ Compare that with the 24% who reported (pre-pandemic) making frequent or occasional trips specifically to view and experience wildlife in their native habitat for photography or other non-hunting purposes. (See footnote 1.)

In MHC's statewide survey on Sunday hunting, 68% of respondents ride on trails on public or private land one or more days a week. And, perhaps most significantly, 85% said they changed their schedules or riding locations to avoid encountering hunters.

We of course recognize that private land owners have some right to decide what uses they want to allow on their land. But such rights have never been absolute, as any review of zoning and land use rules can plainly establish. And, as a practical matter the public/private land distinction affords little relief since public and private tracts are often relatively small, non-contiguous, intertwined and rarely well-marked. In our survey, referenced above, 56% of respondents said they ride on trails that cross both public and private land.

⁶ <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/maryland-is-the-9-state-with-the-fewest-registered-hunters/ar-AAPKtT8>

CONCLUSION

We urge the Committee to give SB 777 an unfavorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

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THE MID-SHORE HORSE INDUSTRY

Talbot, Caroline, and Dorchester

Number of Horses

3,150

Number of Stables

830

Equine Acres

9,300

Capital Expenditures

\$15.5 million

Non-Horse Assets

\$138 million



Data Source: Maryland Horse Census; USDA Ag. Census
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THE LOWER SHORE HORSE INDUSTRY



Wicomico, Somerset, and Worcester



2,870
Number of Horses



900
Stables



13,843
Number of equine acres



\$129 million
Total Assets



\$2.8 million
Capital Expenditures



\$147 million
Economic Impact
Ocean Downs and Assateague



*Data Source: Maryland Horse Census; USDA Ag. Census
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The Maryland Horse Industry

Why Does It Matter?

51% of Maryland households contain at least one horse enthusiast
Maryland has 10.5 horses per square mile, more than any other state



1. Economic Impact

\$2.1 billion annual economic impact

\$80 million spent on hay, feed, and straw

\$78 million in tax revenue

2. Open Space

Over 25% of agricultural land in horse use

88,000 acres in permanent preservation

Land conserved with private dollars



3. Tourism

Four international competition venues

\$___ generated in Prince George's County

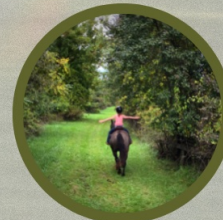
Three internationally televised events

4. Health and Wellness

40 therapeutic riding programs

10,000 children served by educational programs

\$8.4 million economic impact



5. Jobs

>28,000 industry jobs

200 equine organizations

16,000 horse farms and stables

Data source: Maryland Horse Industry Board
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