

## Protect Maryland Poultry

Protect animals, public health and communities

PASS SB1055/HB1030

A Maryland rooster limit law would help protect communities in Maryland from the nuisance, avian disease and crimes associated with cockfighting.

A Maryland rooster law will not affect commercial poultry operations, backyard breeders, or members of 4-H or Future Farmers of America. Instead, it will protect animals, public health and communities by cracking down on those who keep and sell roosters for cockfighting.

Individuals keeping a large number of roosters are likely raising them for cockfighting. In a cockfight, two birds have metal weapons attached to their legs and are forced to fight to the death. Birds suffer painful deaths while spectators gamble on their fate. Cockfighting is also associated with numerous other crimes, such as drug trafficking, illegal weapon dealing, and even homicide.

Cockfighters who breed roosters for fighting typically maintain them outside, tethered in unsanitary conditions with no oversight. Because the birds are housed outside, gamefowl yards create an ideal environment for the spread of avian flu, as the birds are exposed to migratory birds that carry and transmit avian flu as well as other diseases. In the last two years, avian flu has affected more than eighty million birds in the U.S. – mostly poultry for human consumption.

**Despite being illegal, cockfighting – and the illegal gamefowl yards associated with it – is occurring in Maryland.**

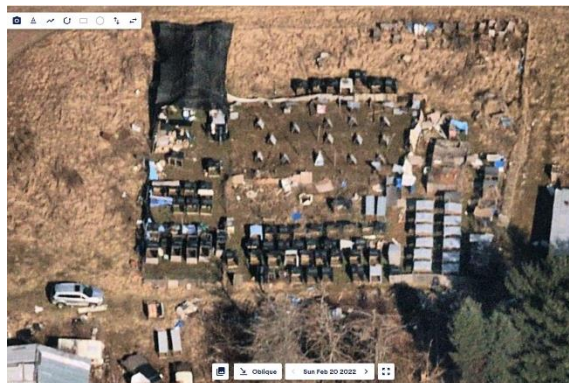
We are aware of four arrests related to running a cockfighting operation over the past nine years from four separate counties: Montgomery, Anne Arundel, Harford and Calvert. Three of those occurred in the last five years, leading to some concern that this activity is increasing in the state.

**Anne Arundel, 2015:** an Odenton man was arrested on cockfighting charges and possession of cockfighting paraphernalia. He allegedly had prior criminal history of repeated sexual offenses on a minor, child abuse, and traffic violations. He was charged with 89 cockfighting-related charges; 67 counts of animal cruelty for cockfighting, and 22 charges for possession of cockfighting paraphernalia (cockfighting implements). The Maryland Department of Agriculture reportedly ordered all 270 of the birds destroyed after testing positive for four highly contagious diseases, including infectious bronchitis. Police do not believe cockfighting occurred on the farm, but the birds were being raised there to be sold for cockfighting.



**Calvert County, 2022:** a Huntingtown man was charged with 9 counts of animal cruelty for cockfighting and 1 count of possessing a cockfighting implement. Although this property did not have a traditional gamefowl yard, the individual allegedly owned, sold, trained and transported nine roosters “with the intent that the fowl be used in a cockfight.” Some of the flock of 9 tested positive for laryngotracheitis, an infectious respiratory disease.

**Harford County, 2021:** an individual was charged with and convicted of aggravated animal cruelty, cockfighting, being a cockfight spectator and abuse and neglect of an animal and running cockfighting ring. He allegedly ran the cockfighting operation from a 36-acre property in Street zoned for agricultural use. Satellite imagery shows evidence of a gamefowl yard. Detectives reportedly seized 209 fowl from the property, as well as “multiple pieces of evidence indicative of a cockfighting operation.” As Harford County Sheriff Jeffrey Gahler said in a statement, “It is hard to believe this type of animal cruelty could be occurring in our community, but it serves to illustrate that no place is immune from this type of activity.”



**Montgomery County, 2019:** a Silver Spring resident was arrested on charges of aggravated cruelty to animals. He was charged with 22 counts of aggravated cruelty to animals. According to the Statement of Charges, more than 100 roosters and hens were removed from a property in Burtonsville, and several roosters had their combs and wattles removed. Implements associated with cockfighting were found. Satellite imagery of his Burtonsville property reportedly shows evidence of a gamefowl yard.



This bill is needed to address illicit cockfighting operations because, under current law, it is exceedingly difficult to prove birds are possessed with the intent to fight them. This legislation sets a limit for how many roosters can be kept on a property, creating a simple misdemeanor that gives local Animal Control Officers and the Department of Agriculture the authority to protect animals, communities and the Maryland poultry industry from the negative consequences of cockfighting.

**Support SB1055/HB1030: Agriculture – Roosters – Restrictions**