

# animaleQUALITY

**Bill:** HB 0357  
**To:** Chair Marc Korman, Vice Chair Regina T. Boyce and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee, Room 251, House Office Building Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
**Position:** Support  
**Date:** January 23, 2024

Animal Equality, on behalf of our Maryland supporters, strongly supports House Bill 0357. Not only will this bill vastly improve the lives of hens in the egg industry, but it could also protect Maryland residents from diseases caused by unsanitary, overcrowded egg farm conditions.

Most hens in Maryland's egg industry are subjected to a life of cruel confinement and pain. They often spend their entire lives in cramped, wire cages with up to ten other birds.<sup>1</sup> Each bird spends the entirety of her life in a space smaller than the size of single sheet of letter-sized paper and forced to eat, sleep, and defecate in this space.<sup>2</sup> Not only are these hens unable to engage in natural behaviors—like spreading and flapping their wings, walking, perching and dust bathing—but they are also subjected to extreme physical and psychological pain. Stress from overcrowding has been shown to cause extreme psychological suffering, which can lead to feather pecking and even cannibalism.<sup>3</sup>

These conditions are not only cruel and harmful to the hens, but they also pose a significant risk to human health. In overcrowded egg farms, diseases often spread quickly amongst the animals. These zoonotic diseases can be spread to humans, causing sickness, death, and—in some cases—devastating pandemics. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has warned that “. . . 3 out of every 4 new or emerging infectious diseases in people come from animals.” Diseases like H1N1 (swine flu), SARS and MERS (avian flu), and even COVID-19 can be passed from animals to humans.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://thehumaneleague.org/article/battery-cages>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.humanesociety.org/cagefreemd>

<sup>3</sup> <https://animalequality.org/maryland-free-hens-from-cages/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.farmsanctuary.org/issue/public-health/#:~:text=A%20Hazard%20to%20Human%20Health&text=The%20Centers%20for%20Disease%20Control,of%20U.S.%20citizens%20every%20year.>

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Animal Equality strongly supports HB 0357 for the safety of humans and non-human animals alike. Consider the following scenario:

*You're standing on a crowded bus filled to the brim with people. You're pressed up against those around you, feeling as though you're suffocating. Each time you attempt to move, readjusting your grip on the handrail, you press up against someone. Each time someone near you tries to move, they do the same.*

*Then there's the smell. In the middle of summer, you're unable to open the bus windows. You smell the bodies around you, and it's almost unbearable. Because*

*this bus has yet to make any stops, your fellow passengers must relieve themselves somehow. The smell of excrement fills the air.*

*Of course, there's also the noise. The anxious passengers begin raising their voices as you begin to feel sick. One passenger must have come down with the flu, coughing on his fellow passengers. You long for rest, but it's so crowded that you're unable to lie down comfortably. Each time your eyes begin to close, you're jolted awake by the sounds of screaming, the overpowering smells, or fellow passengers stepping on you.*

*You wonder when the bus is finally going to stop to let you off—but it never does. This is the rest of your life.*

Just as humans desire space to move, extend their arms, and breathe fresh air, hens in Maryland's egg industry long for the same. HB 0357 would save countless hens from lives of injury, illness, and death, making its approval both urgent and imperative.

Thank you,

Animal Equality