



MARYLAND  
**HORSE**  
COUNCIL

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

In the House Economic Matters Committee, March 5, 2024

Testimony of the Maryland Horse Council on HB 1443

Consumer and Display Fireworks – Regulation and Tax - FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT

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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 500,000 Maryland householders who make their living with horses, or who just own and love them.

We appreciate the intent of this bill in creating an additional revenue stream for the 9-1-1 Trust Fund and the Senator William H. Amoss Fire, Rescue, and Ambulance Fund. This is a comprehensive bill, but we believe that an additional issue must be addressed.

Although most fireworks are currently illegal in Maryland, there has been some illegal usage. That usage has had deleterious effects - for persons with battle-related PTSD, for pets, and for livestock. In the 48 hours after the Horse Council requested information about incidents where livestock or farm property was injured or damaged as a result of illegal fireworks, we have received numerous reports of panicked horses and cattle, sometimes running through fences - in some cases out on to roads.

These are some of the reports we received:

- Baltimore County - "We have had: a mare abort a foal, a calf get trampled, a horse injured and colic from running and getting separated from their herd friends when they get scared. It only takes one horse to start running to get the whole herd scared. It's only a matter of time before they go through or over a fence and jump in front of a car. . . . Not only does the initial lighting of the fireworks cause a problem, but the trash in the fields that could be ingested by my horses, or the risk of fire in the field are also concerning."
- Frederick County - "My husband's brother's dairy cattle were euthanized due fireworks set off right next to his dairy farm in Walkersville, Md. Our dairy farm is an adjoining farm to his and we also lost several cattle . . ."

- Davidsonville - "My pony, along with the rest of the herd,... got scared and burst through the fence onto Governor's Bridge Rd and Rt 424/Davidsonville Rd. One of the ponies was struck by a car and killed but fortunately the humans were not. Fireworks and half ton animals can kill not just the horses but puts innocent humans on the road at risk !!!"
- Howard County - "I had horses severely frightened by a large illegal fireworks display. Horse bolted (raced in a blind panic) straight through a solid fence out onto a road and galloped down the road. . . . they were found almost a mile away. They were extremely traumatized, physically scraped and deeply bruised with a pulled tendon in one making him permanently unusable. . . . There would be way more of this were true fireworks permitted. As development moves into farmland there are many smaller farms enclosed in neighborhoods. These farms need to be included and protected especially as the general public has less knowledge, than previous generations, of farming and large animal needs and thus no consideration if the impact of their actions on these animals."
- Baltimore County - "Our horses have been injured with muscle tears and colic, cows have lost their calves due to stress, and the psychological stress to all involved is a stiff price to pay for the neighbors brief moment of enjoyment. "
- Baltimore County - "Every week leading up to New Years Eve and the 4th of July, the barn owner and other boarders are on edge worried about the safety of their horses. Despite work to desensitize our horses, the unpredictability and loud noise of the fireworks still spooks even the calmest horses especially when ignited in close range. Our horses have injured themselves running into fence boards in a blind panic, as well as becoming so sweaty and worked up due to their fight or flight instinct that they have stocked up and gotten sick because of the sudden level of activity."
- Annapolis - rocket set off by neighbor landed on barn roof
- Harford County - "I live on Jarrettsville Pike and Manor Road. Every year neighbors light off fireworks. They are 300 feet away and I can still hear them from inside my home. It terrifies my dog. It terrifies wildlife who frantically run across roads into unsuspecting drivers. We had a woman who ran into a herd of deer running panicked across the Pike because of neighbors lighting off fireworks. I have picked up loose dogs on Jarrettsville Pike who ran from home afraid of fireworks being set off. I have caught loose horses that ran through their fence because of fireworks."
- Baltimore County - "A number of our farms store fertilizer, which contains nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium . . . The nitrogen content of fertilizers is frequently improved by the addition of ammonium nitrate, [which] is capable of exploding violently if exposed to an open flame or other ignition source. . . . With untrained people lighting fireworks, it is reasonable to have concern for fertilizer stockpiles or fields of newly spread fertilizer being ignited by a stray ember - causing a wildfire situation.

This account summarizes many of the issues:

"On Memorial Day weekend 2023 they set off fireworks which almost caused me to be trampled by my mare. . . . When the 4th [of July] is coming I get sedation shots from my vet. I put my animals in the farthest field and just before the show starts I give a shot to keep them calm. The one mare I had was so scared of loud noises I had to sedate her. Once things start I put them on a lead line and stay out in the field so they won't run themselves through the fence. This past Memorial Day I had no idea about fireworks until they set them off. No time to sedate. I went in the stall to get the mare to put out and she ran through the stall door dragging me into the field.

She was a great babysitter for my other horse but for my safety my vet euthanized her a week later. The display they had on July 2023 she would have had a heart attack and I'm glad she didn't have to experience it.

It's not just the loud noise from fireworks. I have to walk my fields to pickup all the fallout from them. I don't want my animals eating gunpowder and getting sick. I have bags of fallout that I picked up from my fields."

As the organization charged with representing the interests of equines and equestrians in Maryland, we are very concerned about these instances where the use of fireworks in proximity to horse barns and pastures has resulted in horses and other livestock injuring themselves, sometimes quite seriously or even fatally. The risk to human handlers or passengers in vehicles is also real.

We note that the bill prohibits use within 300 feet of a structure, but the bill must be amended to establish adequate minimum distances not only from barns, but also from fenced pastures, and to require written notification.

We urge the Committee to amend the bill to add the following:

No person may use consumer fireworks within 500 feet of an animal housing facility or a fenced area designed to confine livestock owned or managed by another person. If a person uses consumer fireworks at a distance of 501 to 1000 feet from an animal housing facility or fenced area designed to confine livestock owned or managed by another person, the user of consumer fireworks shall notify in writing the owner or manager of the livestock at least 72 hours in advance of the use that consumer fireworks will be used in the area.

If so amended, we urge the Committee to give the bill a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

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