



MARYLAND
HORSE
COUNCIL

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

Testimony of the Maryland Horse Council on HB 262

Department of Agriculture – Maryland Agricultural Commission & Young Farmers

Environment & Transportation

FAVORABLE

The Maryland Horse Council (MHC) is a membership-based trade association that represents the \$2.9 billion, 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.

The horse industry is the largest component of Maryland’s agricultural industry, which is itself the largest commercial industry in the state. The horse industry comprises at least \$2.9 billion of the \$8.25 billion in agricultural economic impact on the state, compared to only \$1.23 billion in economic impact from the next largest segment, the poultry industry.¹

We are, therefore, pleased to see the Department of Agriculture taking the initiative to change the composition of the Maryland Agriculture Commission to reflect more accurately the farmers it represents.

The current seat on the Maryland Agricultural Commission is restricted to “horse breeding.” While the horse breeding industry in Maryland is significant – one of the largest Standardbred breeding operations in the country is in Maryland, and Maryland’s numerous sport horse

¹ See AMERICAN HORSE COUNCIL ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY FOR MARYLAND (2023) (available at <https://mdhorsecouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Maryland-Report-2023-Pages-HQ.pdf>) and MHC’s infographics re same (attached)



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breeding farms produce some of the best equine athletes in the world – it is but one portion of the overall industry.

An American Horse Council economic impact report released in 2024 shows the relative size of the non-breeding sectors as follows:

- Recreational riding (including lesson barns, boarding barns, private farms, etc.) has a \$421 million impact on the state;
- The competition sector (excluding racing and breeding) has at least a \$370 million impact on the state;
- The harness racing sector has a \$278 million impact on the state in addition to the \$43.1 million in economic impact in gambling revenue generated by the Ocean Downs Casino;
- The equine-assisted services sector contributes \$36 million; and
- The horse rescue and horse sanctuary sector contribute \$3.16 million.

HB 262, if passed, would bring the perspective of these critically important components of the commercial horse business to bear on the Maryland Agriculture Commission’s work, which will, in turn, improve the Department of Agriculture’s ability to fulfill its mission “to provide leadership and support” to this, the largest portion of its constituency.

We urge a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL

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