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March 9, 2026

Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 1502, Consumer and Display Fireworks – Regulation and Tax

To the Maryland General Assembly:

This letter is submitted as testimony in opposition to House Bill 1502, Consumer and Display Fireworks.

I am a homeowner and horse owner in Derwood, Maryland. Fireworks are dangerous and should remain banned for consumer use in Maryland. When I learned about HB 1502—which would allow the detonation of commercial-grade fireworks with a minimum distance of only 150 feet from surrounding properties—I was appalled.

A setback of only 150 feet from neighboring properties is simply not sufficient to ensure safety when fireworks are involved. As a horse owner and caretaker, I know firsthand that this distance would do little to protect horses, riders, or nearby residents from the risks fireworks create. Horses are large prey animals with extremely sensitive hearing and a powerful instinct to flee when they sense danger. Sudden, explosive noises like fireworks can easily cause them to panic, even when the source of the sound seems far away.

When horses panic, they may bolt, rear, or attempt to escape enclosures, which can result in serious injuries to the horses themselves as well as to anyone handling or riding them. These reactions can occur even when the fireworks are not visible, as the sound and smell can travel far beyond the proposed setback distance. For horse owners and others who care for animals, this creates a constant and very real safety concern.

The effects of that panic go beyond the immediate risk of injury from a frightened horse attempting to flee. Fireworks can cause intense stress in horses and that can lead to serious medical issues, including colic. Anyone who has dealt with colic understands how dangerous it can be and how quickly it can become life-threatening. I experienced this heartbreak personally when I lost my own horse to colic last year in a situation that could have been avoided. Stress-induced colic is a very real risk, and increased exposure to fireworks would only raise that risk for many horses.

The panic, fear, and stress that fireworks cause in horses do not simply end when the noise stops. Allowing fireworks this close to areas where horses live creates a situation that is ripe for disaster. Even if horses make it through the night without an obvious injury or incident, the effects of that experience can linger.

Because horses are prey animals, the stress and fear triggered by fireworks can remain long after the event itself. Horses may remain reactive, anxious, or easily startled for days, weeks, or even months after being exposed to that level of stress. Their behavior during this time can become unpredictable, creating serious safety concerns for riders, handlers, and anyone working around them. A frightened or reactive horse can unintentionally cause significant harm, making the long-term effects of fireworks just as concerning as the immediate ones.

Fireworks are already being set off far too often despite the current laws restricting their use. In my own neighborhood, the explosions are common around holidays and are increasingly used during private celebrations and family events. Each unexpected blast sends a wave of fear and stress through animals who have no way to understand what is happening. For horse owners, every sudden detonation brings immediate worry about whether a horse will panic, injure itself, or suffer serious

Allowing HB 1502 to pass will only make this problem far worse. Allowing people to set off fireworks—especially commercial-grade fireworks—within as little as 150 feet of neighboring properties will bring even more noise, chaos, and danger into communities where horses and other animals live. If this bill passes, it will inevitably lead to more people setting off fireworks more often, placing animals and the people who care for them at constant risk. Those of us responsible for their safety will be left dealing with the consequences—frightened animals, potential injuries, and the very real possibility of tragedy—simply because more fireworks were allowed so dangerously close to where we live and care for our animals.

On behalf of myself, my husband, Nicholas, and our horse, Dinero, I respectfully urge the committee members to issue an unfavorable decision on HB 1502.

Sincerely,

Olivia Kelsch