



MARYLAND
HORSE
COUNCIL

P.O. Box 610 | Lisbon, Maryland 21797
www.mdhorsecouncil.org

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

In the House Economic Matters Committee, March 11, 2026

Testimony of the Maryland Horse Council on HB 1502

Consumer and Display Fireworks – Regulation and Tax - UNFAVORABLE

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 the interests of over 700,000 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. And we appreciate the Sponsor's attempt to address our previously expressed concerns. However, the bill does not go far enough to adequately address those concerns.

Although most fireworks are currently illegal in Maryland, there have been longstanding problems with illegal usage. That usage has had deleterious effects. In recent years, we have received numerous reports of panicked horses and cattle, sometimes running through fences - in some cases out on to roads, as well as the risk of ignited material landing on buildings, pastures, etc.

These are some of the reports we have received:

- From a Retired MD Dept. of Natural Resources Police Officer - I'm writing to fully oppose this bill to allow fireworks to be set off in private backyards, for multiple reasons which includes public safety issues. Fireworks are not toys, cause severe injury and ignite fires. . . . Fireworks are also known to set fires which in other states have destroyed homes and forests doing irreparable harm. At a time when more advanced light show demonstrations are being used by neighboring states . . . it's important to learn from past mistakes and misuse of explosive things and focus on less impactful ways to celebrate that all neighboring properties can appreciate without tragedy or unfair costly mitigation to simply live and enjoy your home and farm as intended and supposedly protected by law. Furthermore this state has

Environmental noise laws currently in effect and although not locally enforced as it should be due to some counties not having the equipment to measure noise, this law would be in direct conflict with allowing explosives to be detonated on residential property. COMAR 26.02.03

- Anne Arundel County - "Just last year, a neighbor was setting off fireworks for the Fourth of July. . . . While I was tending to my horses in my barn that night, I noticed an orange glow from outside a window, long after the fireworks display ceased. I looked through the trees to see a blaze in front of my neighbor's attached garage. They had turned in early, and were unaware of the fire. I called 911. The fire consumed their new SUV, which was parked outside, and had started burning the garage by the time the fire department arrived. . . . A tree line that runs the border of our properties was within 75 feet of the fire, which was rising at least 40 feet into the air. Had the fire department not been there as quickly as they were (I'm less than two miles from the firehouse), I'm sure those pine trees with the dry needles on the ground would have been ablaze, as cinders were drifting onto my property. It was determined that improperly extinguished fireworks was the cause."
- Montgomery County - "On Oct. 15, 2021 and without warning, fireworks were set off at a neighboring property . . . the result was a stampede that caused one of the horses to suffer a compound fracture. The herd was in a field, well over 150 feet away from the fireworks." The horse had to be euthanized.
- 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.
- 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 . . ."
- Anne Arundel County - "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.”
- Anne Arundel - 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.”
- Washington County - “Geriatric and Special Needs Care: I previously owned a geriatric, Off-the-Track Thoroughbred who was night blind. The sudden, booming concussions and flashes of light were particularly agonizing for him, as he could not visually process the source of the noise, leading to extreme distress and the risk of him colliding with fencing he could not see. Safety of Children and Forced Sales: I owned a Hackney pony mare for my children that I was ultimately forced to sell. During firework events, her terror became so unmanageable that it was no longer safe for my children to be around her or for her to remain on the property. I had to choose between my children's safety and a beloved family animal. Impact on Wild-Born Animals: I currently care for four BLM Mustang mares. These animals have lived their lives in the wild and have no concept of man-made explosions. In July 2024, a filly I had just adopted was still in her gentling pen when the fireworks began, she became so frantic that she attempted to jump the panels of her pen. This put her at immediate risk of broken limbs or a broken neck and jeopardized months of progress in her rehabilitation and training. The "72-hour notice" suggested in HB1502 does nothing to change the physiological flight response of a horse. You cannot "warn" a Mustang that an explosion is coming, and you cannot protect a night-blind horse from the vibration and sound that causes them to bolt.”

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