

MSP Position on HB1502.pdf

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Position: UNF



State of Maryland
Department of State Police
Government Affairs Unit
Annapolis Office (410) 260-6100

POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

DATE: March 11, 2026
BILL NUMBER: House Bill 1502 **POSITION:** Oppose
BILL TITLE: Consumer and Display Fireworks – Regulation and Tax

REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

This legislation seeks to authorize the sale and possession of consumer fireworks. The bill further authorizes the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) an integral part of Maryland Department of State Police (MDSP) to issue permits for the display and sale of consumer fireworks. The OSFM will be required to inspect proposed product and approve sales locations as the bill establishes location criteria.

Under current law, only ground based sparklers are approved for sale to the public. Other commercial fireworks are approved for sale to commercially permitted businesses for displays. These commercial displays are similar to the fireworks launched at celebrations by fire departments, the Inner harbor, etc. The OSFM is responsible for permitting the businesses and the handlers of the fireworks.

One major concern with House Bill 1502 is that the bill requires temporary consumer fireworks stands to comply with NFPA 1124 requirements for consumer fireworks retail sales and storage, but the scope of that code has been significantly narrowed in the 2026 edition. The last edition of this code is 2006. The 2013 code was rescinded. The OSFM becomes responsible for the inspection and licensing of these new business locations. The number of temporary sales locations are expected to increase exponentially statewide.

This legislation also delegates the regulatory authority of defining certain fireworks to the American Pyrotechnic Association by stating “APA 87-1, 2001 and its successor editions. That means APA can change the rules and Maryland (and the OSFM) has to just accept whatever the industry creates.

Fireworks cause serious injuries and deaths every year to those who are not respecting the danger these fireworks can bring. While the OSFM understands people will go to great lengths to purchase fireworks from other states and bring them back to Maryland, we anticipate that should House Bill 1502 pass as written, there will be a greater number of fireworks in our neighborhoods and as such we would expect to see an increase in the number of injuries and/or deaths caused by the fireworks. The greater ease of availability the greater the number of sales and sadly there will be more injuries and/or deaths.

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POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

For these reasons, the Maryland Department of State Police urge the Committee to give House Bill 1502 an unfavorable report.

Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 1502.pdf

Uploaded by: Christine King

Position: UNF

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

Christine King

March 9, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee, My name is Christine King, and I am writing to respectfully express my strong opposition to House Bill 1502, which would allow the detonation of commercial-grade fireworks under conditions that include a minimum distance of 150 feet from surrounding properties.

As a native Marylander who lived in Florida for 30 years before returning, one of my reasons for returning to the State were the laws and priorities in Maryland that recognized the care and treatment of our beloved animals and fellow humans.

Fireworks caused havoc on the dogs and horses in Southwest Florida where I lived. The animal shelters were always crowded after New Years Eve, Fourth of July, and any other holiday Floridians could think of for lighting fireworks, because scared pets ran away or were just traumatized and ill.

Horses had to be kept indoors and monitored for the extreme stress of fireworks, it took preparation and caused anxiety to horse owners and caregivers and the animals.

Horses Are Important to Maryland's Economy and Heritage Horses are deeply woven into Maryland's history, culture, and economy. From the state's longstanding Thoroughbred racing tradition to the many farms, training facilities, and equestrian programs across the state, horses contribute significantly to Maryland's economic, agricultural, and recreational sectors.

Protecting equine safety is not just an animal welfare issue—it is a community and economic issue as well.

- The MD horse industry is responsible for more than 28,000 jobs and has an economic impact of nearly \$3 billion.⁶
- More than 30% of households in MD contain horse enthusiasts who participate in or attend recreational equine activities.⁷

House Bill 1502 may appear to regulate fireworks use does not adequately account for the presence of horses and other large animals and dogs and pets that are extremely vulnerable to explosive noise. For those of us who care for and ride horses and have dogs, this bill creates a real and preventable safety risk. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to oppose House Bill 1502. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Christine King

Gaithersburg MD

Testimony Fireworks.pdf

Uploaded by: DIANA DELMAR

Position: UNF



Millhaven Farm, LLC

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**To The House Economic Matters Committee
Regarding HB 1502, Consumer and Display Fireworks — Regulation and Tax
From Diana Delmar, owner, Millhaven Farm
March 5, 2026**

Thank you Chairman Valderrama and other members of the committee for considering this written testimony.

I own a horse boarding business in Derwood, Maryland where the staff and I care for 42 horses of various breeds, ages and sizes. With this testimony, I will share just two of several incidents that demonstrate the peril fireworks pose to horses — with the hope it helps convince the Committee that allowing consumers to use fireworks is an ill-conceived idea.

On Oct. 15, 2021 and without warning, fireworks were set off at a neighboring property. Because many if not most horses are terrified by the sight, smoke and noise of fireworks, 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. These photos illustrate the horrific results that required the horse to be euthanized. Needless to say, the owner of the horse was sickened and heartbroken.





Here's a photo of another injury sustained by a horse I rehomed at a farm in Woodbine. The horse panicked and bolted when fireworks were unexpectedly set off a week before July 4. The horse survived but, as you can see, sustained serious leg wounds that took a considerable amount of time and treatment to heal.

It is also too often forgotten that fireworks are a huge danger to people trying to control terrified horses.

Despite current law restricting their use, we expect fireworks on July 4 — one of the most dreaded days of the year for horse owners. At my farm and others, horses have to be confined to the barn, no matter how hot and miserable. The doors must be closed to hide the sight of fireworks and we play loud music to try and mask the sound. We hope the smell of smoke doesn't reach us.

Fireworks put off by consumers on other days of the year are even more dreaded since they are unexpected and owners have no time to intervene, as illustrated by the examples above. Again — this is despite the current restrictions on fireworks.

Allowing consumers to put off fireworks will make the situation with horses even worse. The restriction of 150 feet away from a barn or pasture is woefully inadequate. Consider that many horse owners keep their horses in a field and don't have a barn; 72 hours-notice would be useless. Even for horses in a barn, setting fireworks off 150 feet away is far too close. In addition, wind can cause smoke from fireworks to travel for miles.

Horses have a rich history in Maryland and the horse industry is an important contributor to the state economy. It would be outrageous to permit fireworks that can cause suffering, permanent injury and even the death of horses so that consumers can have a few seconds of thrill setting off fireworks. It is disrespectful to horses and unfair to their owners who have to deal with the emotional trauma and expense that results.

I am a lifelong Maryland resident and would much prefer that our legislators focus on laws that *protect horses*, not laws that hurt them.

Thank you again for your consideration.

Diana Delmar

Unfavorable_HB1502_fireworks.pdf

Uploaded by: Gina Miller

Position: UNF

My name is Gina Miller and I am submitting this testimony as a Carroll County citizen. I oppose HB 1502, the "Consumer and Display Fireworks" bill.

This proposes to allow fireworks at 150 feet from a barn. As a horse owner, this is a disaster for me. Horses are panicked by fireworks. They will run blindly. That is a stampede. It is truly terrifying to try to control 1200 pound animals that are running full speed in panic mode. There is a reason for all those cowboy songs about terrible stampedes.

I have an ongoing fireworks problem in my neighborhood as it is. A neighbor about one half mile away does a huge fireworks display every 4th of July. This panics my horses terribly. How do I deal with it now? On the morning of the 4th of July, I give them a first dose of sedative. Before dark, I bring them in and give them a second dose of sedative. I lock them in their stalls and close up the barn, run fans and play music so as to drown out the outside sounds. I have a third dose of sedative ready. When the fireworks really start, they will panic in their stalls. If I stay close and comfort them and feed them treats, they will stay safely in the stalls. I stay with the horses until all the fireworks are over, usually after midnight. This is always my 4th of July. It is totally my least favorite holiday.

The fireworks my neighbor sets off are huge. They rival what the fireman's carnival does. This puts me in a terrible bind. Do I call the police and turn in the neighbor? We all need to depend on each other, so I need to stay on good terms. This neighbor is a very nice person, and he apologizes that our horses panic but he is still setting off the fireworks. It is important to him to impress and entertain his social circle. He spends many thousands on this fireworks display. All the non-livestock owning neighbors love the fireworks. So I'm stuck going along to get along. This situation dictates that I spend every 4th of July protecting my animals and just praying it is enough to keep my animal family safe.

The first year of these fireworks, I was not prepared and my horses stampeded in a panic. I was in a dangerous situation trying to control the horses. I was lucky, no harm came. But what if they had gone through the fence? They could have caused a traffic accident killing themselves or the people in the cars. They could have injured themselves, meaning thousands of dollars of vet bills. Would my neighbor pay for this? Does anyone take this into account? Can we mandate that there be insurance for such incidents? Even if there was insurance compensation, it doesn't really make it right. These equines are partners and family members with value beyond money. If they are injured, not only are there vet bills, there will be many hours of care required to allow them to recover from injuries.

Already no one is obeying the current laws about fireworks. Passing something loosening those laws only sends the message that its ok to set off anything that people can get their hands on. This leaves farmers with cattle or horse-owners with equines all the responsibility to protect their animals. This close limit of 150 feet is terrifying for this situation. Just one more thing that makes it hard to be a farmer. People love moving to the country. They want it to stay country because it looks nice for them. But they don't want to be burdened with any of the responsibility or limits that it takes to support farmers.

I oppose this bill.

TestimonyInOppositionToHB1502.pdf

Uploaded by: Heather Ovelmen

Position: UNF

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

Heather Ovelmen

March 9, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Heather Ovelmen, and I am writing to respectfully express my strong opposition to House Bill 1502, which would allow the detonation of commercial-grade fireworks under conditions that include a minimum distance of 150 feet from surrounding properties.

150 Feet is Not a Safe Distance for Horses

As a horse owner, I can say with certainty that 150 feet is nowhere near a safe distance to prevent serious harm to horses, riders, and bystanders. Horses are prey animals with extremely sensitive hearing and a powerful flight instinct. Sudden loud noises—especially explosive ones like fireworks—can trigger panic responses even at significant distances.

- Horses can hear sounds up to 4,400 meters, or about 2.73 miles away, and the unpredictable, rapid bursts of fireworks can escalate fear responses and keep animals in a prolonged state of panic.¹
- Panicked horses react instantly and with tremendous force. They may bolt blindly, run through fences, collide with obstacles, or fall.
- A frightened horse weighing over 1,000 pounds can easily cause catastrophic injury or death for itself, its rider, handlers, or anyone nearby.

I was once thrown from a horse because a car backfired, despite the car being more than 150 feet away. Fireworks are louder and more jarring than a car backfire, and the suddenness and unpredictability of explosions make them particularly dangerous.

Stress Caused by Fireworks Can Cause Serious and Even Fatal Health Problems

Beyond immediate injury risks, severe stress can also have delayed health consequences for horses.

- Horses exposed to stressful environmental stimuli such as the unpredictable, explosive noise from fireworks, show increased oxidative stress markers.^{2,3}
- Elevated oxidative stress markers lead to stress-induced or “psychogenic” colic.⁴

¹ InfoHorse. 2020. https://www.infohorse.com/how_do_horses_hear.asp

² Fazio, E., Medica, P., Cravana, C., & Ferlazzo, A. (2013). *Effects of competition stress on oxidative status in horses. Journal of Equine Veterinary Science.*

³ Hajimohammadi et al. (2023). *Association of the severity of colic in horses with oxidative stress biomarkers and acute-phase proteins. Journal of Equine Science.*

⁴ Murray, M.J., & Crowell-Davis, S.L. (1985). *Psychogenic colic in a horse. Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association.*

- Colic is one of the most common equine emergencies and is the leading cause of death for horses aged 1-20 years, according to the USDA National Animal Monitoring System Study.⁵

I have personally lost two of the four horses I've owned to colic, and the suddenness and severity of this condition make it devastating for horse owners both emotionally and financially.

Horses Are Important to Maryland's Economy and Heritage

Horses are deeply woven into Maryland's history, culture, and economy. From the state's longstanding Thoroughbred racing tradition to the many farms, training facilities, and equestrian programs across the state, horses contribute significantly to Maryland's economic, agricultural, and recreational sectors.

Protecting equine safety is not just an animal welfare issue—it is a community and economic issue as well.

- The MD horse industry is responsible for more than 28,000 jobs and has an economic impact of nearly \$3 billion.⁶
- More than 30% of households in MD contain horse enthusiasts who participate in or attend recreational equine activities.⁷

House Bill 1502 may appear to regulate fireworks use, but the proposed safety distance does not adequately account for the presence of horses and other large animals that are extremely vulnerable to explosive noise. For those of us who care for and ride horses, this bill creates a real and preventable safety risk.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to oppose House Bill 1502.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Heather Ovelmen
hovelmen@gmail.com
410-206-7479

⁵ United States, Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services, Center for Epidemiology and Animal Health. *Equine Mortality in the United States, 2015*. USDA-APHIS-VS-CEAH, February 2017, https://www.aphis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/equine15_is_mortality.pdf

⁶ Maryland Horse Foundation. Feb. 1, 2024. <https://marylandhorse.com/article/economic-impact-of-maryland-horse-industry-grows-to-2-9-billion>

⁷ United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services, Center for Epidemiology and Animal Health. *Equine Mortality in the United States, 2015*. USDA-APHIS-VS-CEAH, February 2017, https://www.aphis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/equine15_is_mortality.pdf

JWC written testimony HB 1502 FIREWORKS.pdf

Uploaded by: Jacquie cowan

Position: UNF



Riding To a Different Beat

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March 9, 2026

To the Maryland House Economic Matters Committee

Ref: HB 1502 OPPOSED (Fireworks)

I am submitting this written testimony against HB 1502 on behalf of our average 300 family members, and as an Association Member of the Maryland Horse Council (MHC). I am not opposed to the beautiful public displays of fireworks around the New Year and Fourth of July holidays like so many cities put on by trained professionals. I am opposed to legalizing the sale of fireworks.

Horses are fight or flight animals. They obviously have no means to fight off a threatening display of fireworks that can seem as if the sky might be falling down around them. So, their natural instinct is to run wildly trying to escape the barrage of noises and explosions that can send them barreling through fences and down public streets. Securing them inside a barn or stall can leave them circling madly and prone to fractured legs and necks. Some of our members who live in proximity to public holiday firework displays actually move their horses to safer areas for a few days to protect them.

National statistics show there is a 31% increase in the number of missing pets reported to animal shelters and animal control agencies around these same holiday firework displays. Pets kept indoors are traumatized requiring special medications.

I can only imagine how traumatic fireworks must be to our military veterans with PTSD.

Sadly, the average person who might purchase and set off fireworks in their neighborhood might not think about these facts; or the draught conditions we have been experiencing here in Maryland. Last year in the height of the draught, my neighbor put on a beautiful fireworks display across the street, stupidly firing into the nearby woods. Another neighbor ignited my horse's pasture!!!!

I implore you please – give this HB1052 an unfavorable report.

Respectfully,

Jacquie Cowan

Jacquie Cowan

Association Representative to the Maryland Horse Council
Anne Arundel Coordinator for TROT (Trail Riders of Today)
Event Organizer for Tuckahoe Equestrian Center
Retired Mounted Search and Rescue
Former Volunteer Mounted Patrol (VMP) for DNR

testimony - fireworks.pages.pdf

Uploaded by: Jane Seigler

Position: UNF



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 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

Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 1502.pdf

Uploaded by: Madeline Cohen

Position: UNF

March 9, 2026

Economic Matters Committee
Maryland General Assembly
231 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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

Dear Committee Chair and Members,

My name is Madeline Cohen. I am the owner of a horse that lives at a boarding facility in Montgomery County, Maryland. I am writing to oppose HB 1502 because it creates a grave threat to the safety of Maryland animals and farm workers.

The bill is of particular concern for horse farms. Horses are prey animals. Running from frightening stimuli is their “primary means of survival.”¹ Horses often react to “unexpected unknown noises” with “rapid flight.”² One study found that “fireworks are the commonest sound causing a fear response” in horses.³ These fear responses can “cause severe accidents for the horse and the rider/handler.”⁴

For example, at the barn where I currently board my horse, a firework incident on a neighboring property led to a stampede in one of our horse fields. One of the horses suffered a compound leg fracture and had to be humanely euthanized the following morning. If any farm workers were on site during the stampede, they likely would have been trampled.

I urge the Committee to carefully consider how many other horses and humans will be put at risk if HB 1502 becomes law. The Maryland horse industry employs over 21,000 people⁵ and generates an annual economic impact of \$2.9 billion,⁶ with over 30% of residents participating in or attending equine activities and events.⁷ The National Agricultural Statistics Service estimates

¹ Williams, C. A. (2004). *The basics of equine behavior*. Rutgers University. https://esc.rutgers.edu/fact_sheet/the-basics-of-equine-behavior/

² Riva, M. G., Dai, F., Huhtinen, M., Minero, M., Barbieri, S., & Dalla Costa, E. (2022). The Impact of Noise Anxiety on Behavior and Welfare of Horses from UK and US Owner's Perspective. *Animals: an open access journal*, 12(10), 1319. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani12101319>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

that there over 94,000 horses in the state.⁸ Maryland has “more horses per square mile than any other state in the United States.”⁹ If enacted, HB 1502 could be catastrophic for these horses, equestrians, and farm workers.

Although HB 1502 envisions fireworks being used only at a certain distance from farms, the distances provided are arbitrary and insufficient, and the state does not have adequate resources to enforce these distance requirements. Subsections 10–102.1(B)(6)–(B)(7) of the proposed legislation would allow detonation of fireworks within 151–300 feet of an animal housing facility or pasture with notice to the owners, and detonation at a distance of 301 feet or greater with no prior notice. These minimum distances are woefully insufficient given horses’ acute senses.

Furthermore, there is no guarantee that citizens will take time to learn about these distance regulations, let alone comply with them. Once backyard fireworks are legalized, Maryland citizens will be emboldened to purchase and utilize them on their properties, regardless of location or proximity to farms.

I strongly urge the Committee Members to oppose this bill to protect the lives and welfare of Maryland’s animals, their owners, and agricultural workers.

Respectfully submitted,



Madeline Cohen, J.D.

⁸ The American Horse Council Foundation (2024). *2023 Economic Impact Study of the Maryland Horse Industry*. https://mda.maryland.gov/horseboard/pdf/AHC_EIS_FinalStudy2024.pdf.

⁹ Executive Order 1.01.2025.23, available at https://governor.maryland.gov/Lists/ExecutiveOrders/Attachments/96/EO%2001.01.2025.23%20Maryland%20Horse%20Industry%20Strategic%20Planning%20Initiative_Accessible.pdf

Letter Opposition To HB1502.pdf

Uploaded by: Olivia Kelsch

Position: UNF

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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

HR 1502 .pdf

Uploaded by: Rita Creitz

Position: UNF

Good morning. My name is Rita Creitz and I am the owner of three horses that I board at a boarding facility in Montgomery County. I am formally submitting my STRONG opposition to House bill 1502.

My reasons for opposition are several:

One. Horses, being prey animals, are easily startled by surprise and sound, and can be uncontrollably fearful of any loud noise or explosion. Fireworks, no matter what the constraints or conditions identified in this bill, are EXPLOSIONS! We had an incident several years ago when a neighbor exploded fireworks. The horses in the nearby field essentially stampeded in their effort to flee from impending danger. One of them broke his leg and needed to be euthanized. It was an UNNECESSARY death of a lovely horse who was deeply loved as a member of the family. UNNECESSARY, HEARTBREAKING GRIEF!!

Two. Fireworks affect how horses are kept safe. In the summer the horses are out all night. But not on July 4. Every July 4, the horses are kept in with the doors closed and with music playing in an effort to keep them calm and out of danger.

Three. This isn't just about horses and their inherent prey animal instinct to flee in times of danger. It is about the dogs that tremble uncontrollably and hide under the bed or hide in the bathroom until the noise stops. My cat hides in the closet. It is also about the wild animals such as deer, rabbits, fox, possums, raccoons, birds, etc. Do we know how it affects them? Does it matter to you?

Four. What about people with PTSD?! Don't you care about their response to fireworks??! You SHOULD CARE!!

Here are my questions for the committee:

There are already restrictions on use of fireworks that are being violated. Why did you feel it was necessary to loosen those restrictions and permit potentially MORE use of them and more violations?

How are you going to enforce this? You're not enforcing the current restrictions so what makes you think you have the personnel to do more?? Is this the best use of your limited resources? Be realistic please!

Finally, what do fireworks really contribute to our society and culture? Can't we celebrate in other ways that are fun to honor a special occasion, AND respect the fear of these EXPLOSIONS by other living beings?

PLEASE, please, do not support this bill.

Sherry HB 1502.pdf

Uploaded by: Sherry Goldman, M.D.

Position: UNF

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HB 1502

I hope the committee members give an unfavorable decision on HB 1502.

Fireworks are dangerous and should remain banned for use by consumers in Maryland. I have been adversely affected personally by fireworks and, as a board-certified psychiatrist, can attest to the harm fireworks cause individuals with PTSD.

On October 15, 2021, fireworks were set off to celebrate the Hindu New Year at a facility next to the barn where I boarded my beloved thoroughbred horse Adam. It was a warm night, so the horses were far out in a field — probably a football field away from the Hindu facility. When the fireworks were set off, it frightened the horses and initiated a stampede. Adam sustained a compound fracture of his left rear leg. He suffered in extreme pain the entire night until the injury was discovered the next morning. He was in shock from the loss of blood, which was in puddles as he tried to ambulate toward the gate on three legs. The farm veterinarian came immediately when contacted, but the injury was so severe the horse had to be euthanized.

This was heartbreaking and entirely preventable. The Hindus put a video of the fireworks on Facebook, so I know exactly when this nightmare occurred. Had they informed the horse farm owner, the horses would have been kept in their stalls for the night. But even then, the horses likely would have had a stress reaction and could have injured themselves in their stalls.

Fortunately, Adam was the only horse injured, but many other horses could have been harmed. Someone from the fire department visited the Hindu compound, explained that what they did was illegal and confiscated unused fireworks. Despite this episode, they set fireworks off again in October 2025 — and again without warning — but this time the horse farm owner intervened in time, before there was another injury to a horse.

This kind of problem occurs despite current laws restricting fireworks. Laws allowing consumers to set off fireworks means more consumers will use them, making the threat to horses far worse! It's not just the sight of fireworks that frighten horses, it's the sound and the smell, both of which can travel much further than 300 feet!

Please consider too that horses are not the only animal petrified by fireworks. Dogs are extremely sensitive to loud noises and often go “crazy” when they hear fireworks. One of my own dogs

became frightened and agitated when fireworks were set off in the neighborhood. The panic lasted for hours.

In my psychiatric practice, I have treated many individuals — particularly veterans — with PTSD who are terrorized by fireworks because the sound and bright flashes of light resemble gunfire or explosions.

A PTSP episode is characterized by intense reactions to trauma triggers with sudden flashbacks (reliving the traumatic event), nightmares, panic attacks and extreme irritability or emotional numbness. These episodes are often associated physical symptoms such as shaking, sweating, heart racing and feeling jumpy (hypervigilance). The symptoms can last for months or even years and cause considerable misery for sufferers.

It is my strong personal and professional opinion that HB 1502 be rejected.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Sherry D. Goldman, M.D.

Sherry
D. Goldman, M.D.

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