



MARYLAND
HORSE
COUNCIL

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

In the House Environment & Transportation Committee, February 27, 2026

Testimony of the Maryland Horse Council on HB 1063

Natural Resources - Hunting - Management - 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 Marylanders who make their living with horses, or who just own and love them.

HB 1063 grants sweeping and unprecedented powers to DNR to expand all types of Sunday hunting without granting reasonable access for input from the non-hunting public. It must be rejected.

HB 1063

- Will transfer control of Sunday hunting regulation from the State Legislators, who represent all of their constituents, to the MD Department of Natural Resources (DNR), which, as a practical matter, routinely represents just hunters on this issue, even though a majority of Maryland residents oppose Sunday hunting.

- Creates a three year pilot program to implement this transfer of power, and prohibits DNR from ever authorizing any fewer Sunday hunting days/times than are in effect when the pilot program begins, so the program is conceived and designed to only expand Sunday hunting.
- Appears to create a blanket allowance of Sunday hunting on public land (except for the state park system).
- Allows year-round 7-day-a-week hunting of deer on any property of 10 acres or more that has deer damage to crops, forests, or landscaping, and allows shooting in those cases as long as it is at least 25 yards from DNR designated equestrian trails.
- Generally allows Sunday hunting of migratory game birds.
- Adds a second 3:00 pm-to-sunset Sunday hunting period to counties that currently have a 10:30 am cut off.

This bill would make it State law that Sunday hunting can never be curtailed, and only expanded, in the future, despite that fact that a majority of Marylanders oppose Sunday hunting. An independent statewide survey conducted by Gonzales Research and Media Services in 2018 found that 68.9% of respondents oppose Sunday hunting, and of that, 53% strongly oppose it. A copy of that survey has been filed with this testimony. Even DNR's own 2018 survey found that a majority of the general population is not in favor of Sunday hunting.¹

Removing direct authority over Sunday hunting from the Legislature results in a process that is much less transparent and accessible than the current system. For example, the DNR bi-annual meetings where ideas for new regulations are discussed are by invitation only, as were the DNR meetings this summer where the idea of removing control from the Legislature was proposed. Most Marylanders do not have the bandwidth to regularly check the Maryland Register for new proposed rules, and the notice and comment

¹ https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Documents/2018_DeerPublicOpinionSurvey.pdf

process afforded there does not provide for oral testimony and question-and-answer interchange between the regulators and the regulated. Although the Joint Committee on Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review (AELR) reviews proposed regulations, that review is limited in scope to determining whether the regulations conform to the statutory authority of the agency and the legislative intent of the statute under which the regulations are proposed. Moreover, there is no possibility for a public hearing except in some cases by request of an AELR member. Again, the public is generally unaware of this process.

Through the years MHC has testified numerous times about how Sunday hunting is not only opposed by most Marylanders, but that it is patently unsafe for hunters and non-hunters to contemporaneously share outdoor spaces. (See the Hunting Accident Report filed with this testimony). Legislation pending in this Session, SB 545/HB 716, which would require written permission for surveyors to enter private land during deer firearms season, is an acknowledgement of that very fact. During the House hearing, the sponsor stated that “every year there are accidental deaths from hunting,” and “you can’t have people walking around in the woods” . . . “the safety factor is a big thing.” It is inarguable that armed hunters present a safety risk not presented by other user groups. It just makes sense that those other user groups should have at least one day when they do not have to take that risk. That decision should be with the Legislators who represent all of their constituents. We urge the Committee not to grant unfettered power to an agency, which - for some perhaps understandable reasons - sees its constituency on hunting issues as solely hunters.

It has been argued that this legislation will help alleviate the clearly intense workload of the Legislators during Session. We fully appreciate the enormous workload of the Legislators, but would point out that, of the approximately 2500 bills introduced in each session, very few relate to Sunday hunting - For example: two in 2024, four in 2025, three in 2026 (not counting cross files of some those bills, and not counting this bill).

It has also been argued that transferring control to DNR is appropriate, as DNR is the expert on wildlife management. We acknowledge and truly

appreciate that DNR is staffed with dedicated wildlife managers. That said, the reality is that recreational Sunday hunting, while having financial benefits to DNR, is not a very effective wildlife management tool. In counties that vastly expanded Sunday hunting in 2013, the deer harvest has pretty consistently fallen year over year.²

In the course of its efforts over the years to address the Sunday hunting issue, the MHC negotiated a compromise that would allow fair shared use of natural resources, by cutting off Sunday hunting, where allowed, at 10:30 am, and this compromise has been embraced by the Legislature. This bill, at least until the pilot program goes into effect, chips away at the concept of “fair & shared” by taking more Sunday time away from non-hunters, adding a second hunting period from 3:00 pm until sunset on Sundays.

The bill allows year-round 7-day-a-week hunting of deer on any property of 10 acres or more that has deer damage to crops, forests, or landscaping - a significant expansion of the existing program for agricultural crop damage permits - and allows shooting under those permits as long as it is at least 25 yards from DNR designated equestrian trails. There are at least two very significant problems with this proposal. First, 25 yards - 75 feet - is an incredibly short distance. In Natural Resources Article Section 10-410 (g), the Legislature has determined various “safety zone” distances for discharge of weapons in certain circumstances - as much as 300 yards, but never less than 50 yards.

Also there are many, many trails used by hikers, bikers, birdwatchers, dog walkers, etc., - on public and private land - that are not “a Department trail designated for equestrian use,” where hunters could shoot right up to the property line.

it may be suggested that Maryland should adopt this bill because other states allow Sunday hunting to be exclusively regulated by their game

² Allegany - An increase of from 6 to 21 Sundays. In 2013-2014, the total harvest was 3636; in 2023-24 - 2952; 2024-25 - 3412.

Frederick - Increase of from 6 to 15 Sundays. 2013-2014 - total harvest 8040; in 2023-2024 - 6549; 2024-25 =1,999 6869.

Washington - Increase of from 6 to 21 Sundays. 2013-2014 - total harvest 6376; in 2023-24 - 4418; 2024-25 - 5066.

control agencies, most recently Pennsylvania. Each state is unique. Patently, Maryland is not like Pennsylvania in many respects. For example, Pennsylvania's population density is 286 people per square mile; Maryland's is 632 people per square mile. Thus, determination of where and when discharge of weapons should be allowed has wholly different considerations.

Finally, this is a complicated bill that, while it may ultimately result in a shorter statute, may not result in a less complicated regulatory scheme.

We urge the Committee to give HB 1063 an Unfavorable Report.

Respectfully submitted,

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