

February 26, 2020

Support HB 897 - Black Bear Damage Reimbursement Fund – Pets

Dear Chairman Barve and Esteemed Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

I have tried to write this letter for months, but it has been too painful to re-live the occurrences I experienced in May of 2018. I am attempting to make you aware of the tragedy I encountered. I feel Garrett County is overpopulated with black bears. I would love to see passage of House Bill 897.

On Thursday, May 24, 2018, I had a home invasion at 3:00 AM by at least one black bear. The intruder broke through a door at the rear of my home and entered my attached garage. It then dragged a garbage can containing a 50lbs bag of dog food into my backyard, as well as 3 bags of my weekly household garbage. The bear also ransacked my garage, apparently looking for more food sources.

My 8 year old border collie, Teedow, who lived in the home with me and my 2 children, awakened me to the commotion, I immediately cleaned up the outside mess, picked up the garbage, and shoveled up the dog food that was strewn through the yard and over the bank at the rear of my home.

I did not contact the DNR, as I have had previous issues with bears in the 24 years I have lived in this neighborhood, and the DNR just tends to ignore the issues and gives the "that's just the way it is" attitude.

Three days later, at 10:30 PM on Sunday, May 27th, Teedow and I went out into the front yard so he could relieve himself before bed. He immediately ran to the rear of the house barking. I yelled for him to come back, but he did not. I saw a large bear attacking my dog and they ran over the bank. All I could hear was fighting and growling. I continued to scream for Teedow to come back.

After a few minutes, the fighting stopped and Teedow came crawling up over the back. I got him in the house and could see that his back had been ripped in several places, and he was bleeding from his neck. I immediately called Pineview Veterinary Hospital, got him in the car, and took him to the hospital. Sadly, as a result of his injuries, I had to have him euthanized. Monday was Memorial Day.

My son, Joshua called the local DNR on Tuesday morning to report the attack of our dog, and the resulting death, due to the bear attack. The man Joshua spoke with called the situation "The perfect storm," explaining that the bear had discovered garbage and dog food in the garage and broke in, came back to look for more food, was confronted by the barking dog and attacked.

The DNR officer offered to come out and set a trap and capture the bear, explaining that they would "discipline" the bear with rubber bullets and pepper spray, then set it free. The DNR

representative stressed that Maryland does not euthanize bears. The DNR representative then told Joshua that if the bear returns, and we feel threatened, Joshua could shoot the bear, and the DNR would come out and pick it up.

I was forced to euthanize my dog, but the DNR refuses to euthanize the bear? The bear killed my dog, but the bear is set free to again possibly attack? Perhaps the next attack will be on a child rather than a pet! This is so, so wrong!

My dog was my companion and a pet. I adopted him from Mineral County Humane Society 3 years prior to this tragedy. He was a kind and gentle dog and never even chased a deer. Dr. Hutsell explained that Teedow sensed that the bear was a threat and he was probably trying to chase it away to protect me. Teedow sacrificed his life to protect mine. I am totally heartbroken and so angry that this happened.

I work a full-time job and raise two kids as a single parent. It has not been easy. I pay my mortgage payments, real estate taxes and my bills. My dog was on my property, and now he is deceased. He was a pet, and part of our family. He was the best dog I have ever had. Border collies are known for their intelligence and loyalty. They are great dogs!

I realize that bears are wild animals, but when they come onto people's properties with no fear, they are overpopulated. They have no fear because they are allowed to do whatever they choose to do and never face any consequences.

Why was the bear allowed to go free when it killed my dog? Why was it not killed too? Is it going to take a young child to be attacked in their own yard for someone to wake up and realize there is a problem? Why does the DNR not have to pay for the damage a bear causes?

I realize the State of Maryland has a bear hunt, but why not increase the bounty and decrease the population further? I grew up in West Virginia, and we did not have bear issues. We rarely saw bears, because the state chose to keep the population under control, with an annual hunt, and permits could be purchased by whomever wanted to hunt. There was not a "lottery" with a designated number of permits issued.

I moved to Garrett County in 1994 and at the time was amazed at the number of bears we saw in our neighborhood. The sightings have decreased a little over the years, but they are still too frequent, in my opinion. The tourists love seeing bears, but they do not have to live with them on a continual basis.

In 2001, in this same neighborhood, I had another dog attacked by a black bear in broad daylight, in my front yard. My dog, Tuffy was playing in the yard and unknowingly got between a mother and a cub. Tuffy was attacked, but fortunately survived after a week in the hospital and a \$1,000 vet bill.

| contacted the DNR, and received the "that's just the way it is" excuse and was denied my request for reimbursement for Tuffy's vet bills. I was told "We do not pay for damage to pets." My question is WHY?

If Maryland wants to protect the black bears, the State should be held responsible for the damages they cause. If the State of Maryland had to pay for the damages to pets and property, they may realize how many occurrences there are and try to further reduce the population.

Basically, black bears have the right to create havoc to property and pets, and neither they, nor the State are responsible. That is not right.

I am seriously rethinking my choice to live in Garrett County any longer. I have lost the best dog I have ever had, and damage to property, and a previous attack that costs me \$1,000. I pay high property taxes to live here, and cannot feel safe to have a dog and let it be outside, nor can I feel safe to be outside after dark. I cannot afford to replace doors because I store my dog food in the garage. This entire situation is sad.....

I heard of another bear/dog attack this year. Another local girl lost her dog to a bear attack. Also, I heard of 2 miniature horses being killed by bears. Sadly, the bears have more rights in this county than the people who live here.

I have included my vet bills, in case the DNR would be gracious enough to reimburse me for the monetary loss of my pet companion. Although this will not pay for the new door I need to replace or replace my amazing dog. Border collies are great dogs and it is quite costly to purchase a border collie.

In closing, I feel the State should be held accountable for the actions of the bear overpopulation and make payment to the taxpayers who experience losses....to pet owners, not just farmers. If they were required to make restitution they may realize how many people are affected by loss of pets.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I urge a favorable report for HB 897.

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