

Support for SB 505

I am co-owner of Lambert's Carriage Company and a lifelong horse owner. My father, Donnie Lambert, and I provide carriage rides in downtown Frederick and the surrounding areas during the holiday season. We began the carriage company ten years ago as an avenue to share our passion of draft horses and driving with the community. For many people riding our carriages, this is the only opportunity for them to interact directly with a large animal. Many of our patrons come back year after year to see our horses and take a relaxing ride thru the City of Frederick. This seasonal business is really a hobby for us, as my father is a dairy farmer and I am a full-time veterinarian.

Throughout the ten years of doing carriage rides in downtown Frederick, there have been many instances of people willfully and maliciously interfering with the carriage horses. Six years ago, we had a lady stand in front of our horses yelling and insisting that we unhook them. She refused to move despite our requests, until we threatened to call law enforcement. For the last three years we have been regularly harassed by an animal rights group called the Frederick Vegan Army. They have pushed the boundaries of their First Amendment right by harassing and stalking my father and I, our employees, our patrons and our horses. Two years ago, one member of this group brought his two husky dogs to the protests. They repeatedly barked, growled and lunged at the edge of their leashes. The owner intentionally stood at the front of the horses and allowed his growling dogs to get within inches of them. Despite our requests for him to relocate further up the street when the horses were getting unsettled, he simply laughed and stayed in his place. Last carriage season, three men from this animal rights group chased my carriage for two blocks yelling profanities and threats. In response, my horses picked up their pace and were obviously stressed at the incident. On other occasions, they have stalked the wagon in their vehicles while yelling out the window or leaned signs into the streets as the horses were driving by, missing them by inches. These are just a few examples of the interferences that my horses have had to endure throughout the past few years.

We have been very fortunate that the horses nor the carriage riders have been harmed as a result of any of these events. Despite that, these actions pose a huge risk to the animals and the public. The protests have required a large police presence each night. Despite their presence, there has been very few legal actions that the police have taken in response to these incidences. This has been largely due to the lack of legislature pertaining to working horses specifically.

In conclusion, we see an immediate need for legislature that would criminalize behaviors where people willfully and maliciously interfere with the carriage horses. We certainly do not want to tread on anyone's right to free speech, but we do want to promote a safe environment for our horses and patrons. We hope that SB 505 will protect the safety of our horses and allow them to do their seasonal work without harassment. We also hope that this bill will give the police officers leverage to reduce such dangerous situations.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,
Jessica Lambert, DVM
Lambert's Carriage Company, Co-Owner