

Testimony in support of Senate Bill 505

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This is my written testimony in support of Senate Bill 505, Crimes Against Animals, Interference With Equines

I am writing as an individual and as President of the My Lady's Manor Driving Club (the only American Driving Society affiliated club in Maryland) in support of SB505. I am an ADS listed instructor and a Carriage Association of America Certified Driver. I have spent over 40 years studying and sharing knowledge about horses. I have competed successfully at high levels in several types of riding and also in driving horses. I also work on rehabilitation horses with physical or behavioral issues. I have also been a large animal Vet Tech with experience in animal behavior, control and biosecurity. Drawing on my knowledge and experience I have provided information on safe practices and risk management of equines in public spaces to several jurisdictions in Maryland.

We have over 100,000 horses in Maryland with an economic impact of \$2.1 Billion including \$78 million in tax revenue. More than 50% of households in Maryland contain a horse enthusiast and we are known internationally for our horse culture in this State (American Horse Council 2017 census). Yet we are at a place in time that those living an agrarian life working with animals are rapidly declining and actual knowledge of the appropriate care and handling of livestock animals is no longer common knowledge.

Every Spring veterinarians get urgent calls to see horses that are flat out on their sides who are actually sunbathing. I've been called cruel for "blindfolding" my horses when they are actually wearing special screen masks that protect from flies. At a Frederick City Council meeting animal rights activists testified that horses were forced to work who were lame- that were in fact just resting a hindleg. It took a veterinarian to testify that this was completely normal behavior- similar to us resting a leg when standing. I have been told I "should take down (my) fences so horses could roam freely as they would in nature". It was a serious suggestion from someone who was willing to help do it!

As separated as many people are from the agrarian life there are some who are willing to believe the worst about All farmers and All who exhibit or have large animals based on the poor husbandry and treatment of animals by few. There has been a romanticizing of horses in public perception due to books and movies such as “The Black Stallion” (Walter Farley) and “Spirit, Stallion of the Cimmaron” that has led to a lot of misunderstanding and anthropomorphizing with a result that the true nature of horses and interacting with them is ignored. This is not just my observation but also that of Olympic Gold Medalist Denny Emerson and others who work to educate on good riding and care.

This bill is an important piece of legislation that offers protection and some peace of mind to those who are willing to share their love and knowledge of animals with those who want to see them. It adds needed strength to their voice that when they say “No, do not touch the animal” it means NO. People often try to continue justifying it verbally with “animals like me”. That may be true but in that moment the handler has seen something that No is appropriate. Having an automatic “No” in place, that animals may not be interfered with- even when the animals are just in a pasture, empowers good biosecurity practices. We need this bill.

Equestrians are supposed to be able to share the road as do cyclists and in quieter areas that still happens- especially where there are small farms amongst subdivision development. The neighbors usually like that farms keep some space open and green and enjoy seeing the horses. But there are those who think it fun to scare the horses when they are out on the roads. This creates risk of severe injury to rider, bystanders, and horses and damage to equipment or properties. A driving horse may never accept driving again as it requires a higher level of trust. These days you will not be able to just fill in a hoof print on a lawn. You will most likely get a big bill from a landscaper and threat of a lawsuit. Prevention is better than cure. We need this bill.

Even an animal in a field needs this bill. Gates left open or fencing destroyed allowing animals out create public nuisance, danger to those driving cars, risk of severe injury to people and the animals themselves. I had gates opened several times when a developer I was leasing from was trying to “encourage” me to break a lease (if I had it resulted in immediate need to move plus substantial financial penalties). There are other reasons it happens but having this legislation in place may deter people from

endangering the public with such actions. With no limits on Equine Liability in Maryland, even though we take all precautions as animal owners we are legally liable and vulnerable to losing everything through legal action against us- and all because of someone else's actions. We need this bill.

I support free speech but all too often we see that speech degenerate into hatred, vehement words, insults and energy directed at the person *when the horse is in such proximity that it is difficult for them not to think it is directed at them*. Horses in particular are acutely aware of energy around them. That proximity is a key issue as it creates considerable stress and uncertainty for the horse and can result in panic, rearing and bolting. Horses can react and move much faster than most large animals and in a state of panic represent a considerable danger to others and themselves with a high risk of injury. As many equestrian events are now held on Public Land or in Public spaces this is a perfect storm for a serious accident to occur. We need this bill.

I sincerely hope this bill passes so we can continue to share our animals safely with those who want to enjoy them. I thank those who have sponsored it as it is much needed provision for public health and safety as well as the safety of our animals and our right to enjoy lawful pursuits with them whether competitive, recreational or even just stewardship and coexistence with them.