

Regarding The Maryland Horse Council

2/2/23

My name is Victoria Picha and I am an active youth participant in Maryland's horse community. I am testifying in favor of HB 20 because I find it irresponsible and dangerous that there is no more strict enforcement of the use of helmets for youth equestrians in Maryland. I have grown up around horses my whole life, even owning my own at six years old. I have extensive knowledge of horses but even with my more than a decade of experience, horses are still unpredictable and can be dangerous in any situation. I have watched adults and children around me get injured in all sorts of situations, most of them leaving us in shock. My argument is if all bicyclists under the age of 16 are required to wear a helmet on public property, why don't the same rules or more apply to youth when riding a horse? A horse has its own thoughts and actions, it is much more dangerous and harder to control than a bike. Over the summer my riding coach got into an accident while riding one of her horses. The horse suffered an aneurysm and fell on top of her while riding in a competition. Sadly the horse, Tora, did not survive but my coach walked away with no serious injuries. If my coach was not wearing the appropriate helmet the effect this accident could have had on her could have been much worse. I have many friends that are youth participants in Maryland's horse community. It is normalized and supported that we wear correctly fitted and in-regulation helmets to prevent common head injuries. I felt the need to share my story because passing this bill would prevent many brain injuries and keep youth members of our community safe. Your consideration of these matters and the importance of safety for our youth is very much appreciated.