

by Kimberly K. Egan, MHC Government Relations Committee



The 2021 session of the Maryland General Assembly closed on April 12, and we are pleased to report that our Government Relations Committee scored several victories this year.

As is so often the case, our victories came in the form of successful opposition to legislation that would have been contrary to the interests of horses and horse people.

Sunday Hunting

Legislators filed a plethora of bills this session that would have significantly expanded Sunday hunting. The bills covered seven counties: Calvert, Caroline, Prince George's, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, and Worcester. In all but Queen Anne's and Caroline, the bills, as introduced, would have allowed Sunday hunting on public in addition to private land.

MHC supports the shared use of natural resources and as such, we testified in opposition to each of these Sunday hunting bills. We also encouraged residents in each county to oppose the bills as well. Our efforts were successful. The Worcester County bill was withdrawn by its sponsors, and each of the remaining bills died in Senate Committee.

A summary of MHC's position on Sunday Hunting appears on page 36 of this issue.

Cost of Care of Seized Horses (HB 1080/SB 760)

A pair of bills this session would have required owners under investiga-

tion for animal cruelty to pay the costs of caring for the animal after the animal has been seized, or forfeit all rights to the animal. We opposed these bills because of due process concerns.

We also opened discussions with sponsors and the committees in an effort to persuade them to exempt livestock – including horses – from the bills. The committees each told us that they would propose an amendment to that effect. In fact, the bills never progressed beyond the initial hearing, and died in committee.

Snare Traps (HB 579)

This bill would have made it legal to use, sell, possess, or set a snare trap in Cecil County. MHC opposed the bill on the grounds that snares are indiscriminate and inhumane killers of animals large and small, and because snares can cause serious injury and suffering to horses and hounds. The bill passed the House but died in Senate committee.

Therapy Horses (SB 284)

The General Assembly passed a bill to add “therapy horses” to the list of service animals eligible for reimbursement by the State's Veterans Service Animal Program. The bill limits eligibility to facilities either certified as Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH) Premier Accredited Centers (PAC) or that have Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) certified professionals on staff.

We had opened discussions with the sponsor and with the therapy horse community to try to expand the definition beyond PATH/PAC and EAGALA facilities. The issue proved complex, however, and we did not arrive at an alternate definition that satisfied both the equine therapy community and the goals of the Maryland Veterans Administration in time for this session.

We are not giving up, however. We will announce a new initiative aimed at therapy horses at the Quarterly Meeting on May 25 and we encourage everyone interested in therapy horse issues to attend.

MHC QUARTERLY VIRTUAL MEETING

Tuesday, May 25, 2021 • Open to All • Via Zoom

6 p.m. Sip & Share

7 p.m. Maryland Legislation: What You Need To Know

How MHC is preserving your legal rights to your horses • Sunday Hunting and Shared Use of Land • MHC's proposed 2022 legislation to define a “Therapy Horse”

plus: Proposed Increased Equine Medical Record-Keeping Requirements and invited guests The Maryland Board of Veterinary Examiners

Regular Business Meeting to Follow



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