

by Kimberly K. Egan, MHC Co-President & Co-Chair of the MHC Government Relations Committee



The 2022 session of the Maryland General Assembly opened on January 12 with approximately 400 bills already in the hopper. Several of the pre-filed bills bear on issues that concern the equestrian community, as follows:

Public Trail Access (SB 86)

Sen. Katie Fry Hester (D-Howard) pre-filed a bill that would require tenants of any DNR-owned property to maintain a border around the leased property sufficient to allow unobstructed access to trail

heads by first responders and trail users. MHC will submit written testimony in support of this bill and will also testify at the hearing once it is scheduled.

Agritourism in Worcester County (SB 32/HB 12)

Members of the Worcester County delegation pre-filed a bill to make it easier for Worcester County farm owners – including horse farm owners – to convert agricultural buildings to agritourism buildings. The bill would, if passed, exempt conversions of agricultural buildings to agritourism buildings from the change of occupancy rules, which means farmers would not need to get a building permit to make the change. MHC will monitor this bill but does not intend to take a position for or against.

Urban Agricultural Incentive Zones (HB 156)

Del. Pam Queen (D-Montgomery) pre-filed a bill to permit local jurisdictions to direct USDA Conservation Innovation Grant funds to 501(c)(3)s that, among other things “(i) support opportunities for local economic development associated with urban agricultural activities...” Horses are considered livestock under Maryland law, which means that horse farms qualify as “agricultural” uses. As a result, this bill could, if passed, benefit equine non-profits that offer services in Baltimore City (such as MHC-member City Ranch) or in the close-in D.C. suburbs (such as MHC-member Wheaton Park Stables). MHC will submit written testimony supporting this bill.

Unattended Dogs (SB 44/HB 16)

Sen. Chris West (R-Baltimore County) and Del. Mary A. Lehman (D-Anne Arundel & Prince George’s) pre-filed a bill that would make it a misdemeanor to leave an unattended dog outside for longer than 30 minutes when the temperature is below 32 degrees or above 90 degrees, unless the dog has suitable shelter or shade. The bill, if passed, would not apply to hunting dogs, livestock herding or guarding dogs, sledging dogs, or sporting dogs. The hearing in the House is scheduled for January 13, and the hearing in the Senate is set for January 19. MHC will monitor this bill but does not intend to take a position for or against.

Sunday Deer Hunting

The Sunday deer hunting bills are back. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) regulates Sunday hunting, as permitted by the legislature on a county-by-county basis. DNR’s jurisdiction covers both public and private land. As of this writing, four counties are asking to expand Sunday hunting during the deer season – Calvert, Prince George’s, Somerset, and Talbot – though if history is any guide, we expect more will be filed as the session progresses. Each of these bills has been filed in previous legislative session and each has failed to pass.

MHC has historically opposed bills to expand Sunday deer hunting on the grounds that there should be at least one day a week during the deer season on which horse people can ride without the risk of injury or interference from hunters. We intend to do the same this session.

Calvert County Sunday Hunting (SB 220/HB 170): This bill, filed by the Calvert County delegation, would, if passed, permit hunting on every Sunday of every season for every species, not just deer. That means hunting of some kind or other would be permitted all year round.

Prince George’s County Sunday Hunting (SB 233): This bill would permit Sunday deer hunting in Prince George’s County from the first Sunday in October through the second Sunday in January. Prince George’s County currently does not allow any Sunday hunting.

Somerset County Sunday Hunting (SB 98/HB 143): This bill would, if passed, permit hunting on private land on every Sunday of every season for every species, not just deer, and would also permit Sunday hunting on public land that is leased to a hunt club. The bill is sponsored by Sen. Mary Beth Carozza (R-Eastern Shore) and Del. Charles J. Otto (R-Somerset & Worcester).

Talbot County Sunday Hunting (SB 140/HB 51): This bill would, if passed, permit Sunday hunting on each Sunday of the deer hunting season (October through the second Sunday in January) and on each Sunday of the spring turkey hunting season. The bill is sponsored by Sen. Adelaide C. Eckhardt and (R-Lower Eastern Shore) and Del. Johnny Mautz (R-Lower Eastern Shore).

MHC’s Government Relations Committee meets every week during the legislative session. We will summarize the session’s activities in each issue of *The Equiery*, and we will also provide regular updates in our twice-monthly member newsletter.

MHC’s legislative positions are driven by the concerns of our members. If you would like to join the dialogue, please become a member by visiting www.mdhorsecouncil.org/join.