

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



The complexion of the activity in Annapolis has changed in recent weeks now that the deadline for filing new bills has passed and crossover day approaches. Most bills have had their committee hearings by now, and lawmakers, advocates, and activists are busy with back-room deals and legislative horse-trading.

Crossover day was March 21<sup>st</sup>, which means that was the deadline for each chamber to send those bills that it has passed over to the other chamber for consideration. If a bill does not cross over to the other chamber by March 21<sup>st</sup>, it is effectively dead.

Nine of the bills that MHC supports passed their respective chambers and crossed over. They are:

**Trail Access Bill (SB 86):** This is the bill that Sen. Katie Fry Hester (D-Howard) pre-filed on our behalf that would require tenants of any property owned by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to maintain a border around the leased property sufficient to allow unobstructed access to trail heads by first responders and trail users. The bill passed the Senate on a unanimous vote and crossed over to the House on February 15.

**Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SB 378):** This bill would appropriate \$900,000 to the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC), which publishes the Southern Maryland Horse Extra, an on-line guide to the Southern Maryland horse industry. The bill passed the Senate on a unanimous vote and crossed over to the House on February 23.

**Urban Agricultural Zones (HB 156):** This bill would permit local jurisdictions to direct USDA Conservation Innovation Grant funds to 501(c)(3) organizations 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 and “equine activities” qualify as “agricultural” uses. The bill, which could be beneficial to the Baltimore Arabbers as well as other urban based equine programs, passed the House on a 127-7 vote and crossed over to the Senate on February 25.

**Helmet Law for Minors (HB 713):** This bill would prohibit an adult from allowing a minor to ride a horse on public property without wear-

ing a “properly secured” ASTM-certified helmet. The requirement would not apply to minors who are “practicing for, or competing or performing in a show or event where helmets are not historically part of the show or event; crossing a public highway that separates privately owned land; or engaged in an agricultural practice or pursuit.” The bill passed the House on a 100-34 vote and crossed over to the Senate on March 11.

**Great Maryland Outdoors Act (SB 541):** This bill would appropriate over \$70 million to the state park system, including funds for trail repair, trail maintenance, and trail improvements. The bill passed the Senate on a unanimous vote and crossed over to the House on March 15.

**Winery & Vineyard Economic Development Grants (SB 594):** This bill would appropriate \$1 million to a new Winery and Vineyard Economic Development Grant Program, which would administer grants equal to 25% of the qualified capital expenses incurred by wineries or vineyards. This bill could benefit those wineries that are housed on horse farms, such as The Vineyards at Dodon and MHC-member Hidden Hills Farm and Vineyard. The bill passed the Senate on a unanimous vote and crossed over to the House on March 9.

**Costs of Care for Seized Animals (HB 1062):** This bill establishes a process for a seizing agency to recover reasonable costs of care of seized animals. The bill passed the House on a 127-3 vote and crossed over to the Senate on March 18.

**Agricultural Improvements Assessment (SB 567):** This bill would require improvements on land used for equine activities to be assessed by SDAT as agricultural property. The bill the Senate on a unanimous vote and crossed over to the House on March 18.

**Fair Hill Special Event Area Funding (SB 679):** This bill would permit the Governor to appropriate \$1.8 million every year for ground operations and upkeep at the Fair Hill Special Event Area. The bill passed on a unanimous vote and crossed over to the House on March 18.

Two of the bills that MHC supported died in committee: the bill that would have expressed the intent of the General Assembly that Marylanders have the “right to ride,” (HB 116/SB 345); and the bill that would have exempted electricity that is used for livestock from the sales tax, (HB 1002/SB 800).

One of the bills that MHC opposed – the bill that would have permitted Sunday hunting for all species for all Sundays in all counties (HB 1279) – also died in committee.

All of the other **Sunday hunting bills – for Somerset, Talbot, Calvert, Queen Anne’s and Charles counties** – passed the House and crossed over to the Senate.

The legislative session ends on April 11 and a lot can happen between now and then. We will publish the last regular report in our May issue. We will publish a full session wrap up in June.

Did you receive our latest legislative update? The Maryland Horse Council typically monitors over 50 bills annually that may affect our state horse community, everything from minimum wage bills for our farm workers to anti-harassment bills for our working horses. Become a member today and receive these updates throughout the legislative session. Join the Maryland Horse Council to receive legislative updates right to your email! [JOIN.MDHORSECOUNCIL.ORG](http://JOIN.MDHORSECOUNCIL.ORG)