



# THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL

## Government Relations Committee

by Jane Seigler, MHC Government Relations Committee Co-Chair

Every four years, Maryland state government undergoes a reshuffling, as all 188 state senators and delegates stand for re-election, along with the major state elective offices: Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Comptroller and Attorney General. 2022 was an election year. As the 2023 legislative session opened on January 11, not only were there eight (out of 47) new senators, and 39 (out of 141) new delegates, but also, for the first time in sixteen years, the three most powerful officers: Governor, Attorney General, and Comptroller are all new to their respective offices.

This has broad implications for the functioning of the legislature. About one quarter of the legislature will be learning the ropes of how their respective chambers function (some have served in the past or in the opposite chamber). The number of new faces and their new backgrounds and talents caused the Senate President and the Speaker of the House to change committee assignments and sometimes committee leadership. Added to that, Governor Moore's administration has recruited some legislators to serve in his administration, which further added to the need to re-shuffle committees. Given that the committees are where most of the real work of the legislature gets done, the 2023 legislation session presents new challenges for those of us who work to further and protect the interests of the horse industry and the equestrian community. It's a brand new jigsaw puzzle!

For example, the Horse Council frequently had business before the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee (EHEA); its long time Chair was Sen. Paul Pinsky (D-PG). After the election, Senator Pinsky was tapped by Governor Moore to lead the Maryland Energy Administration. Senate President Bill Ferguson then took the opportunity to rework the jurisdiction of EHEA, which had long been one of the most overburdened committees in the Senate. The new Education, Energy and Environment Committee (EEE) is chaired by Senator Brian Feldman (D-Montgomery), who moved over from the Finance Committee. Moore also selected Senator Nancy Lee (D-Montgomery) to be his Secretary of State, creating a vacancy on the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. Other committees have had similar changes in membership and leadership, which in turn change the internal politics and dynamics of the committees.

As of this writing, we are monitoring several bills of interest.

**HB 20** - prohibits adults from allowing minors to ride on certain public lands unless the minor is wearing a helmet that meets ASTM standards. There are exceptions for "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; engag[ing] in an agricultural practice or pursuit; or a member of an Amish or Mennonite community." The Horse Council has worked with the bill sponsor over several years to craft workable language.

**HB 68** - governs the treatment of electric energy that is produced by a customer's solar panels, for example, and is in excess of the electricity the

customer will consume, so it is fed back into the grid ("net metering").

**HB 72** - changes the definition of "charitable contribution" to exclude property that is intended to be redistributed without charge "for a benevolent, educational, eleemosynary, humane, patriotic, philanthropic, or religious purpose." Authorizations for, or discounts on, materials, equipment and facilities, including those for advertising or broadcast airtime and PSAs, would also be excluded from the definition of "charitable contribution."

**HB 100** - caps the inheritance tax rate for property that is intended to be the primary residence of, or that will be maintained as agricultural land by, a "beneficiary of limited means" (defined as adjusted gross income of \$125,000 for an individual and \$250,000 for spouses filing jointly). The cap would be the lesser of 10% of the "clear value" of the property or 20% of the "federal adjusted gross income of the beneficiary of limited means for the taxable year in which the decedent died."

**HB 102** - establishing certain procedures for the protection of pet dogs and cats in the event their owner is evicted.

**HB 107/SB 59** - among other things, creates a special enrollment period for the MD Health Benefit Exchange for individuals and their dependents who become employed by employers who do not offer health insurance.

**SB 34** - creates a State Ombudsman within the Department of Agriculture for value added agriculture.

**SB 81** - accelerates the timeline for the state-mandated increase in the minimum wage.

**SB 85** - increases the penalties for criminal animal abuse and neglect.

**SB 96** - reduces from 150 yards to 50 yards the size of the safety zone for archery hunters in Howard County; and requires an archery hunter in Howard County to be in an elevated position when hunting any wild bird or mammal within 50 to 100 yards of certain buildings.

**SB 103** - creates a tax credit against state income tax for the installation of rooftop solar panels on residential property.

The above bills were culled from those that had "dropped" within the first 48 hours of the session. By the time you read this, the legislature will have been moving at warp speed, and many, perhaps hundreds, more will have been introduced. And we will have been hard at work reviewing them and deciding on actions needed. All Horse Council members will have been getting regular emailed updates on bills of interest and concern. If you are not a Horse Council member, don't miss out on the information you need! Join now: <https://www.mdhorsecouncil.org/membership/mhc-membership-options>.

Want to know how you can make an impact right now? Go to [mdhorsecouncil.org](https://www.mdhorsecouncil.org), scroll down to the bottom left and click on the "Donate" to the PAC button. Your contribution in any amount helps us fuel our efforts in Annapolis!