



THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL

Government Relations Committee

by Jane Seigler, MHC Government Relations Committee Co-Chair

Below is a report on the bills the Maryland Horse Council has been advocating on or monitoring in Annapolis this session. As of press, the session is about two thirds over, and the pace of activity has become intense, including voting sessions late into the night and on weekends. By the time you read this, some of these bills will have reached a dead end in the process and will not become law this year. That is because, in the Maryland legislative process, each bill must pass both chambers, the House and the Senate, before it can be sent to the Governor for his signature and become law. A critical point in that process is what is known as "Cross Over Day." This year, that day was March 20. Bills that had not passed out of one chamber and "crossed over" for consideration in the other by that date are effectively dead for this year.

Here are the bills that have leapt the **CROSS OVER** hurdle as of this writing. Just making it to the other chamber is no guarantee, however, that a bill will ultimately become law. Because there are so many bills (almost 2300 this year), and so little time, (any bill that hasn't passed both houses by midnight on April 10 is dead), some bills will simply run out of time.

You can check on the current status of any bill by going to <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/> and typing the bill number into the search box.

Helmet bill (HB 20) - requiring minors to wear helmets when riding on certain properties, including facilities for which the primary purpose is recreational, educational, or competitive activities. There are some exceptions, including when practicing for or participating in a show or event where helmets are not historically a part. Passed the House and is now in the Senate.

Value added ag ombudsman/specialist (SB 34/HB 389) - creates a position within the MD Department of Ag to provide support for value added ag operations. We successfully lobbied to get Equine Activities specifically included. Each cross-filed bill has passed out of its chamber of origin.

Hunting and outdoor recreation (SB 327/HB 983) - a very long bill that: establishes the Wildlife Conservation, Education, and Outreach Program to foster interest in outdoor recreation and stewardship, hunting, and wildlife conservation; increases license and stamp fees for the first time in 30/40 years, which will increase federal matching funds; allows the Heritage Conservation Fund to acquire interests in land that can be used by the general public for hunting; authorizes a nonresident attending a college or university in the State to purchase a resident hunting license; etc. BUT one line in the 13 page bill would have allowed statewide Sunday hunting of migratory game birds.

The bill was hotly contested, with intense opposition to the Sunday hunting provision from many eastern shore waterfowl outfitter and guide interests, as well as from MHC. There were many amendments offered. The bills that passed each of their chambers of origin no longer contained the provision to allow Sunday hunting of migratory waterfowl, added a provision that would allow a portion of any increased federal funding to be used for "sacrificial crops" planted by farmers to reduce deer damage, and eliminated or restricted a proposed study to reduce the deer population by allowing Sunday hunting on state park lands.

Therapy horse definition (SB 910) - removes the words "premier accredited" from the listing of Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship, International (PATH, Intl.) member centers as among the entities that qualify for participation in and to receive funding from the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program within the MD Veterans Dept.

Pet eviction protections (SB 279/HB 102) - sets up a series of procedures to protect pets and the pet owners' rights in the event of evictions. Limited to cats and dogs. Passed the House. We tried unsuccessfully to amend horses in. Next year!

Wildlife Advisory Commission membership (SB 320/HB 188) - the WAC is a stakeholder group within DNR's Wildlife Heritage Service, to advise on wildlife issues. Currently, only farmers have a dedicated seat. This bill would add a mandated seat for a wildlife scientist, plus seats for hunters, the wildlife preservation community, and the passive wildlife recreation community. Each cross-filed bill has passed out of its chamber of origin. We tried unsuccessfully to get a seat specified for the mounted and unmounted chasing communities. Maybe next year!

Snare traps (SB 275/HB 406) - requires users of snare traps to obtain an ID number from DNR and make sure that it is on the trap. Each cross-filed bill has passed out of its chamber of origin.

Solar Task force (SB 469) - to study and make recommendations regarding a tax strategy that is more competitive than the State's current strategy to maximize the installation of rooftop solar panels.

On farm composting (SB 262/HB 253) - creates a permit exemption for on farm composting facilities that use less than 10,000 square feet and compost only certain materials, including animal manure and bedding. We successfully requested an amendment that would make clear that the record keeping requirements in the bill do not apply to farmers who compost only their own animal manure and bedding produced on the farm. Each cross-filed bill has passed out of its chamber of origin.

Out of state vets, vaccines, etc. (SB 390/HB 325) - provides for an expedited reciprocity process and allows vet techs or clinical staff to give rabies vaccines to animals in animal control facilities or shelters, if trained and identified on the vaccination certificate, which must still be signed by a vet. Each cross-filed bill has passed out of its chamber of origin.

Electricity for ag purposes (SB 640/HB 678) - exempts electricity used for agricultural purposes from the sales and use tax. (For cases where there are separate meters from the residence.) Passed Senate; amended to sunset in 2 years.

Agrivoltaics (SB 613/HB 908) - a big bill that, among other things, makes permanent a pilot program to encourage community solar. It defines agrivoltaics to include horse boarding breeding and training and provides incentives for agrivoltaics. House bill has passed.

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Worcester (SB 824/HB 466) – Sunday hunting of all species, all Sundays on public and private land. House bill amended to add 10:30 restriction and passed.

Wicomico (SB 796/HB 1087) – Sunday hunting of all species, all Sundays on public and private land. House bill amended to add 10:30 restriction and passed.

Howard County archery safety zone (HB 1005) - reduces from 150 to 50 yards the required distance from dwelling or certain other buildings, but only applies to managed hunts and DMPs and requires elevated tree stands.

These bills **DID NOT CROSS OVER**. Although it is not completely impossible that some of these bills will eventually pass, it is very unlikely.

Animal abuse penalties (SB 85/HB 405) - Increases penalties for criminal neglect that results in the death or euthanasia of an animal, up to 3 years in prison and fine of up to \$5000. Also, a judge can prohibit ownership, possession or residing with an animal for a period determined by the Court.

Solar tax credit (SB 103/HB 1271) - creates credit against state income tax of \$15,000 or 25% of the installed cost of residential roof top solar panels.

Outdoor lighting standards (HB 851) - requires the Department of the Environment to develop outdoor lighting standards that consider energy consumption, environmental, public health, and public safety impacts of outdoor lighting.

Vet student loan forgiveness (HB 1133) - provides for payments of up to \$20,000 to participants who sign a contract to practice in the State for at least 2 years; and requires that participants be selected based on experience, training, and availability to practice in certain high-need areas.

Rodent harborage (HB 841) - authorizes lawsuits against land owners who allow rodents to exist and proliferate on their property. We have asked for an amendment to make clear that an exemption for property “zoned for agricultural use” be broadened to property where farming is permitted, even if the property is not technically zoned as “agricultural.” We have been working with the sponsor to craft new language.

Agricultural use assessment (SB 418/HB 592) - requires that improvements to property in support of value added agriculture be assessed as agricultural and not commercial. We were successful in getting an amendment to make sure that Equine Activities are included as value added agriculture.

Inheritance tax (HB 100) - Capping the inheritance tax on agricultural real property that is bequeathed to a “beneficiary of limited means” at 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. A beneficiary of limited means = federal adjusted gross income is not more than \$125,000 for an individual or \$250,000 for couples filing jointly, surviving spouses or heads of households.

PG County (SB 155) - Sunday hunting each Sunday of the deer hunting season from the first Sunday in October through the second Sunday in January.

Worcester County (HB 467) – Sunday hunting each Sunday of the spring turkey season, public and private land. May become moot if HB 466 fully passes.

Calvert County (SB 323/HB 449) – Sunday hunting all species all Sundays, repealing the 10:30 restriction.

Mid-Shore Sunday hunting (SB 777/HB 1118) – repealing 10:30 restriction for all species in Caroline, Dorchester; for all deer seasons in Talbot; for deer firearms in Wicomico; for Spring turkey in Talbot.