



The 442nd session of the Maryland General Assembly convened on Tuesday, January 13, under conditions never before seen. The Senate Chamber has been divided up into tiny plexiglass cubicles for each Senator. The House “floor” is spread out over several spaces in the Statehouse, to allow for social distancing when floor votes are required. Hearings, debates, and votes, at least initially, will be conducted remotely. But for the first time, virtually all proceedings will be live-streamed for public viewing. The legislative buildings are, for the most

part, closed to the public until further notice. The public may still testify on bills, but oral and written testimony will be digital.

Another huge change is that for the first time since 1970, the General Assembly will convene without the towering presence of former Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller, who succumbed, at 78, to prostate cancer on January 15. He was the longest serving state senate president in the nation, and a great friend to Maryland horse people.

The Horse Council’s Government Relations Committee conducts one of the most important missions of the Council: representing our members in the halls of government. In this column, we will report on

- the bills that have been introduced in Annapolis as of this writing; and,
- some of the recent federal COVID relief legislation that may affect the equestrian community and the horse industry.

A number of bills were “pre-filed” before the session convened; more can and will be introduced until early March (unless there is an early COVID-related adjournment as there was last year). In a typical year, the legislature will consider as many as 3000 bills in its three month session.

Bills of possible interest:

ANIMAL WELFARE

UNATTENDED DOGS (HB 81/SB 122). Making it a misdemeanor to leave a dog outside and unattended for longer than 30 minutes without access to “continuous suitable shelter” during extreme weather conditions (over 90 degrees and below 32 degrees). The bill makes an exception for dogs that are lawfully and actively engaged in hunting, livestock herding, sledding, sporting or training.

TRAINING FOR ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICERS (HB 281/SB 159). Requiring new Humane Society and Animal Control officers to receive 80 hours of training in animal care within the first 12 months of their employment, and existing officers to receive 6 hours of training.

ORGANIZED WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS (HB 293/SB 200). Making it a finable offense to “sponsor, conduct, or participate in a contest organized in the state that has the objective of killing a coyote, fox, or raccoon for prizes or monetary rewards.” No-kill fox chasing would not qualify. Also exempts “killing coyotes, foxes, or raccoons on property of the landowner, provided that the killing is not part of an organized contest” as well as “lawful dog training or dog performance competitions.”

ANIMAL SHELTER EUTHANASIA PROTOCOL (HB 381). Imposing a protocol to be followed by an animal shelter before it euthanizes an animal; requiring animal shelters to take “reasonable steps to achieve a 90 percent save rate”; and generally requiring animal shelters to exhaust all other options before euthanasia. Excludes “animals experiencing irremediable physical suffering.”

EQUINE ASSISTED LEARNING AND THERAPY THERAPY HORSE DEFINITION (SB 284). Defining “therapy horse” for purposes of the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program as “a horse determined appropriate for interactions with veterans by a stable licensed by the state that . . . is a Professional Association for Therapeutic Horsemanship, International (PATH, Inc.) premier accredited member center; or has Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) certified professionals who provide services to veterans.”

NATURAL RESOURCES AND HUNTING RIGHT TO HUNT (SB 318). Declaring that the General Assembly intends to preserve “a right to hunt” subject to restrictions as may be imposed by law. Includes findings that hunting is an important part of Maryland’s economy and contributes to wildlife and natural resource conservation.

SUNDAY HUNTING QUEEN ANNE’S (HB 225). Permitting Sunday hunting in Queen Anne’s County for any game bird or game mammal during the open season for that game bird or game mammal. Private land only.

SUNDAY HUNTING TALBOT (HB 325). Permitting Sunday hunt-

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