



*Of the Anacostia River*

**Re: Bill 6-20, Release of Balloons-Prohibited**

**Position: Support**

What child says, “I’d like to choke a sea turtle to celebrate my birthday”? What couple says, “We want to celebrate our wedding by strangling a seabird”? And quite certainly, people releasing a bunch of balloons to celebrate the life of a loved one who has died do not *intend* to kill sea turtles and birds. But these are some of the tragic results if they celebrate by releasing masses of balloons.

I present this testimony on behalf of the Neighbors of the Northwest Branch (NNWB), a volunteer organization dedicated to protecting the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia and interested in healthy aquatic ecosystems wherever waters flow. We are grateful to Councilmember Hucker for introducing Bill 6-20 to ban releasing balloons, and we fully support its passage.

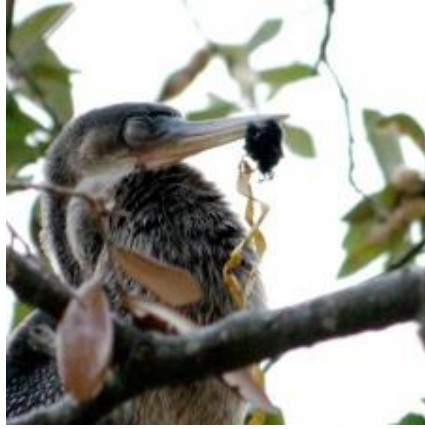
Balloons are yet another part of the plastic pollution scourge we know all too well through our many stream cleanups. Balloons released here may travel many miles to litter Maryland farms and beaches, just as balloons from as far away as Indianapolis have landed in Maryland.

Balloon fragments are a plague for sea birds and marine life. According to a study reported in Science Daily (3/1/19), they are the marine debris most likely to kill, because while hard plastic may, with luck, go through the gut, balloon fragments get stuck and cause fatal obstructions. Ribbons make it worse by extending the obstruction. Balloon fragments even endanger the Assateague ponies. Latex balloons, sold as biodegradable, take up to 4 years to biodegrade. Mylar, a polyester resin, takes longer, if ever, leaving plenty of time to kill. Be it noted that sometimes humans suffer too, such as folks in California where Pacific Gas & Electric Co. reported 203 power outages in the first 5 months of 2018 from foil-coated balloons hitting power lines.

You are hearing from many organizations with documentation of marine damage from balloons. Right now, many more people are realizing the horrible damage inflicted worldwide to land, oceans, and air by the rise in single use plastics that are not, or cannot be recycled. For example, on Earth Day 2020, The Discovery Channel distributed “The Story of Plastic” to 88.3

million U.S. homes and 224 countries and territories.<sup>1</sup> It was also available through Amazon.<sup>2</sup> There have been numerous screenings and discussions panels. Although the film did not specifically mention balloons, it certainly raised awareness of the harm done by plastics loose in the environment.

The problem is exacerbated by our throw-away culture. But NNWB stresses that **with appropriate leadership, regulations, and education called for in this bill, customs with respect to balloons can change.** One of our members even mentioned to me that when she was growing up, she and her friends typically released balloons at birthday parties—they all did. **But she was horrified to see pictures of the results, such as these:**



As we try to be better Earth stewards, ending this unnecessary carnage is a no-brainer. This must be one of the simplest ways to reduce plastic pollution.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thefutoncritic.com/news/2020/02/13/discovery-channel-to-air-the-story-of-plastic-in-honor-of-earth-day-712213/20200213discovery01/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.amazon.com/The-Story-of-Plastic-Special/dp/B087DZ6NXX>.

A child's birthday is so much better celebrated by planting a tree to grow as the child grows. A wedding is better celebrated by planting bushes that can over time entwine. And a deceased loved one's *life* should be celebrated with *life, not death*.

**Please pass Bill 6-20 so that no balloons used as celebrations in Montgomery County harm any more wildlife anywhere.** Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anne Ambler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Anne" being more prominent than the last name "Ambler".

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