



July 24, 2020

Written Testimony for Bill No. 6-20 – Solid Waste (Trash) – Release of Balloons - Prohibited¹

Submitted by:

Joan Boros, ANS Conservation Advocacy Volunteer, Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS)

Denisse Guitarra, Maryland Conservation Advocate, Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS)

Dear Montgomery County Council,

For 123 years, Audubon Naturalist Society has inspired people to enjoy, learn about and protect nature. We thank the Council for the opportunity to provide testimony relating to Bill 6-20. This bill rises to our attention because of the simple opportunity it provides to reduce harm to wildlife from a completely needless activity: releasing balloons into the sky.

The proposed new sections of the County Code's Chapter 48 rise to our attention as they all relate to the significant environmental harms to farms, water and wildlife from the release of bio-degradable and nonbiodegradable balloons and their attached cords. Bio-degradable balloons degrade at about the same rate as oak leaves which can take up to four years to breakdown.^{2, 3} Researchers have found marine mammals, turtles, sea birds, and land animals dead by entanglement in cords or ingestion of balloons and cords.⁴ Marine life, especially sea turtles, can easily mistake balloon fragments for jellyfish or squid – their preferred food choices.⁵ Seabirds have been found to be 32 times more likely to die if they eat balloon fragments, placing

¹ Bill 6-20. Available from:

https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccllms/DownloadFilePage?FileName=2643_1_10472_Bill_6-2020_Introduction_20200225.pdf

² Balloon Facts (2020) <https://balloonfacts.org/articles/are-balloons-biodegradable/>

³ Balloons Blow (2020) Available from: <https://balloonsblow.org/>

⁴ Balloons Blow (2020) Available from: <https://balloonsblow.org/>

⁵ O'Brien (2019) The Environmental Impact of Balloon Releases and Suggestions for Eco-Friendly Alternatives. Available from: <http://sustainability.umich.edu/news/balloon-release-impact>

Woodend Sanctuary | 8940 Jones Mill Road, Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815 | 301-652-9188

Rust Sanctuary | 802 Childrens Center Road, Leesburg, Virginia 20175 | 703-669-0000

anshome.org

their existence in peril.⁶ Furthermore, Latex is commonly found as one of our water pollutants in sewage treatment plants.⁷ It is imperative that the Council approves Bill 6-20 for the health of the people, wildlife and waterways both locally and globally.

Once helium is released into the atmosphere, it is gone forever. ANS notes our planet Earth's dangerously low supply of helium given its many unique and essential uses such as cooling the superconducting magnets in MRI scanners and in breathing ventilators.⁸ These uses don't have fun substitutions for balloon releases, like making natural wreaths. Recycling by the vendors of helium, as well as its purchasers, in its various uses, would contribute greatly to its preservation.

ANS stands ready to assist the Council in identifying and teaching the general public on the importance of banning the release of balloons for the wellbeing of our wildlife, waterways and people. We will also encourage people to make alternative decorations for celebrations, made out of compostable or recyclable materials, as we already do in our GreenKids and Garbology programs in Montgomery County Public Schools. On behalf of ANS and our 28,000 members and supporters, we recommend that the Council supports the passage of Bill 6-20 into law.

Sincerely,

Joan Boros
Conservation Volunteer
Audubon Naturalist Society

Denisse Guitarra
Maryland Conservation Advocate
Audubon Naturalist Society

⁶ O'Brien (2019) The Environmental Impact of Balloon Releases and Suggestions for Eco-Friendly Alternatives. Available from: <http://sustainability.umich.edu/news/balloon-release-impact>

⁷ Duncan (2016) Balloons Pose Risk to Wildlife & The environment. Environmental Nature Center. Available from: <https://www.encenter.org/visit-us/programs/birthday-parties/balloons/>

⁸ Warr (2012) Christmas lectures to call for end to helium balloons. WIRED. Available from: <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/christmas-lectures-vs-helium-balloons>