



P.O. Box 4024  
Rockville, MD 20849

To  
The Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, MD 20850

March 17, 2020

Reg: Bill 6-20 Balloon Release Bill  
Position: Support

The Sierra Club Montgomery County Group supports Bill 6-20, introduced by Councilmember Hucker, to prohibit the intentional release of plastic, latex, rubber, or mylar balloons into the atmosphere. This bill is a simple, yet meaningful way to eliminate a source of harmful litter. Three Maryland counties have already passed similar, bipartisan legislation and a statewide ban is also being considered. In the meantime, we believe that Montgomery County should also approve a ban.

A bouquet of colorful balloons floating up into the blue sky can be a beautiful tribute to a loved one or a way to celebrate an important event. Unfortunately, these balloons eventually return to Earth as litter, tangled in trees, wrapped around bushes, or floating in waterways, sometimes many miles from where they were originally released.

In a research report funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, five states in the coastal northeast and mid-Atlantic recognized that balloons are a dangerous type of marine debris that deserve attention.<sup>1</sup> Balloons that end up in waterways pose a serious threat to birds and marine life. Much like plastic bags, when balloons float in the water turtles mistake them for jellyfish and accidentally ingest them. Balloons and their attached ribbons can be ingested and cause serious injury and death to birds and fish as well. Even on Assateague Island, where balloons are banned, National Park Service officials recently witnessed a wild horse choking on a balloon.<sup>2</sup>

We hope that passage of this bill will encourage a wider conversation about the alarming problem of single-use plastic pollution.

Shruti Bhatnagar, Chair  
Sierra Club Montgomery County, MD  
Shruti.bhatnagar@mdsierra.org

Amy Maron, Zero Waste Lead  
Sierra Club Montgomery County, MD  
Amy.maron@mdsierra.org

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<sup>1</sup> Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean, *Assessment of Marine Debris in the Mid-Atlantic, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York and Virginia*, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Shawn Soper, *Assateague Horse Incident Highlights Balloon Dangers*, Ocean City Dispatch, May 29, 2019.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has approximately 800,000 members.