



October 14, 2021

Re: HB 5373

Dear Chair Howell and Members of the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Committee:

The Michigan Environmental Council, made up of nearly 80 member groups statewide, supports the prohibition of the intentional release of helium balloons. This measure is a natural extension of other litter reduction efforts we also support such as a local government's ability to institute a plastic bag ban, reducing the impact of single use plastics on the waste stream and efforts to monitor and address microplastics in our waters.

Released balloons and their associated strings or ribbons pollute our waters and threaten wildlife. Michigan should join the six other states<sup>[i]</sup> that have banned intentional balloon releases as research shows that in the Great Lakes region, high concentrations of balloon debris have been found on the eastern shores of Lake Michigan. Volunteer surveys conducted by one of our member organizations, the Alliance for the Great Lakes, documented more than 18,000 pieces of balloon debris along Great Lakes shorelines between 2016 to 2018.

The two types of balloons—mylar and latex—both pose environmental threats by contributing to plastic pollution. Mylar or foil balloons contain a metallic coating over nylon and will never biodegrade. Latex balloons are often either mixed with plasticizers and other chemical additives that delay the balloon from breaking down in the environment or are made from a nonbiodegradable synthetic petroleum derivative. The small pieces that break off from a latex balloon that bursts in the atmosphere or are exposed to sunlight and waves are more deadly to wildlife than other types of plastic pollution.

A study by the University of Tasmania<sup>[ii]</sup> found that balloons are the highest risk of all plastic debris items for seabirds. The small, soft pieces from latex balloons are 32 times more likely to kill birds than pieces of hard plastic because they are more likely to become compacted and cause internal blockages. The same study showed that although soft plastics accounted for just 5 percent of the items ingested by seabirds, they were responsible for more than 40 percent of mortalities.

There is no place remote enough to escape balloon pollution. University of Michigan graduate student Lara O'Brien used citizen scientist data

submissions<sup>[iii]</sup> to document discarded balloons and created interactive maps of reported balloon pollution. Data was submitted from Isle Royale National Park, and hotspots around the Great Lakes emerged at locations such as Holland.

HB 5373 would help reduce the preventable pollution caused by intentional helium balloon releases. With plastic pollution a growing problem in the Great Lakes ecosystem, the Michigan Environmental Council supports the passage of this measure to take a meaningful step toward reducing an unnecessary source of this pollution.

Thank you for the consideration of these comments and we welcome any questions.

Sincerely,



Megan Tinsley

Agriculture & Water Policy Manager

Michigan Environmental Council

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[i] California, Connecticut, Florida, Tennessee, Virginia and Hawaii have laws regulating the intentional release of balloons. At least eight other legislatures are considering laws while numerous cities and towns across nine states have passed local measures.

[ii] Lauren Roman, Britta Denise Hardesty, Mark A. Hindell, Chris Wilcox. A quantitative analysis linking seabird mortality and marine debris ingestion. *Scientific Reports*, 2019; 9 (1).

[iii] <https://balloondebris.weebly.com/>