



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 208  
January 29, 2020

The League of Women Voters of Delaware (LWVDE) strongly supports SB208. Small helium balloons may be manufactured from a variety of polymers including natural rubber latex and Mylar (polyethylene terephthalate; PET), They may be metallized, treated with proprietary chemicals or combined with other polymers to slow helium leaks. While latex balloons are biodegradable, they may persist in the natural environment for several years. Other materials can persist much longer.

The bright colors and shiny surfaces of party balloons can attract birds, small animals, fish and marine mammals that try to eat the balloons and either choke to death or die when the balloons clog their digestive systems. Other animals may perish after becoming entangled in partially degraded balloons.

As with other plastics, outdoor degradation of balloons can lead to formation of microscopic particles that pick up toxins from polluted water. These are ingested by small organisms and contaminate the food chain, including species harvested for human consumption.

For all these reasons LWVDE agrees that banning unnecessary release of balloons will protect our natural environment and human health.

We also agree that helium is a vital natural resource that must be protected for important usages now and in the future. Helium is used to provide an inert atmosphere for welding and for manufacturing optical cables for high-speed transmission of data. The need for helium to cool magnets used in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is increasing as the medical profession is finding more uses for this important technique.<sup>1</sup> Among many other uses, Helium is for balloons carrying instruments used to predict upcoming weather patterns.

There are currently sporadic shortages of helium accompanied by spikes in its price. Helium is formed from radioactive decay of uranium and thorium. It is commonly obtained during the extraction of natural gas. As such extraction is limited because of concerns about global warming, there may be serious limitations on helium availability. This situation is likely to require national action, but this bill provides an important step for Delaware.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pubchem.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/element/Helium>