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**Houghtaling & Downey Introduce Bill to Protect Wildlife and Beaches from Intentionally Released
Balloons**

Legislation would fine violators for intentional release or abandonment of balloons or other floating devices.

OCEAN TOWNSHIP—Working to protect wildlife and marine animals from choking on or becoming entangled by helium balloons, Assemblyman Eric Houghtaling (D-Neptune) and Assemblywoman Joann Downey (D-Freehold) today introduced legislation (A4322) to prohibit the intentional outdoor release of inflated balloons, with offenders subject to a \$1,000 fine per violation, or \$2,000 for intentionally tethering a balloon outdoors and leaving it unattended. The legislation would also apply to other floating devices such as sky lanterns or aerial luminary lanterns.

“Balloons filled with helium and other lighter-than-air gases make for great fun at parties, but if they’re not disposed of properly, they can post unnecessary risks to our environment,” said Houghtaling. “Many animals, both on land and in the ocean, are attracted to their bright colors and can mistake them for food, causing severe injury or death. Many more animals become entangled by balloon strings, and can become injured or strangled to death as a result. Folks at the Jersey Shore have enjoyed balloons at celebrations and other events for decades, but it’s important that we do so responsibly, without littering or damaging the world around us.”

This bill is not intended to target children or others who accidentally release a balloon, although Houghtaling and Downey strongly encourage any person handling a balloon to be mindful of the harm it can do to the environment. Instead, this legislation is intended to prevent the unnecessary release of balloons into the environment as part of an event or other occasion.

“Municipalities across New Jersey, including our very own Asbury Park, have already banned the intentional release of these balloons, proving that this is a simple, common-sense step for protecting our local wildlife,” said Downey (D-Freehold). “By expanding these prohibitions statewide, we can clean up pollution and save countless animals from pointless, painful deaths.”

The move was applauded by nonprofit organization Clean Ocean Action (COA), which has been working with towns to draft and pass ordinances to ban balloon releases at the municipal level in New Jersey.

“I am sure the ocean is smiling today. Waves of thanks to Assemblyman Houghtaling and Assemblywoman Downey for launching this important statewide effort to control sources of one of the most harmful types of marine litter, balloons,” said Cindy Zipf, Executive Director of Clean Ocean Action. “Every day, more life-threatening balloons enter the ocean. Let’s work fast to pop this bill onto Governor Murphy’s desk for signing,” she added.

A full list of cities that have adopted ordinances prohibiting the intentional release of balloons inflated with lighter-than air gases includes Atlantic City, Asbury Park, Bradley Beach, Brigantine, Cape May City, Egg Harbor City, Long Beach Township, Longport Borough, Margate City, New Milford, North Wildwood, Sea Isle City, Somers Point, Upper Township, and Ventnor City.

“While balloons are fun and often celebratory, when improperly disposed of and released into the air they are harmful to the environment and lethal to marine life,” said Peter Blair, Policy Attorney for Clean Ocean Action. “This legislation will ensure that balloons are used responsibly and do not end-up in the ocean,” Blair added.

Marine balloon litter is well-documented and is a growing problem in waterways worldwide. In fact, 70,055 balloons were collected by volunteers cleaning NJ’s beaches and shorelines on just 20 days during the 20-year period (1999-2019) of Clean Ocean Action’s biannual Beach Sweeps. Further, [a recent study](#) in the leading ocean policy journal Marine Policy ranks balloons as #3 of the 20 deadliest trash items in the ocean (e.g., plastics bags, bottles), based on the comprehensive impacts on sea turtles, birds, and mammals.

“Balloons stay longer on land and in the marine environment than in the air as litter, yet, intentional outdoor balloon releases to commemorate occasions continue to happen and litter the waterways and land,” said Swarna Muthukrishnan, Staff Scientist for Clean Ocean Action. “Risks to marine biota by way of entanglement and colorful ‘confetti’ mistaken for food by animals far outweigh the joy of seeing a few balloons floating in the air for a short period of time before they fall to the Earth as litter.”

As celebrations resume after COVID-19 restrictions, from graduation to July 4th parties, Houghtaling and COA encourage New Jersey residents to support the bill, keep balloons inside, and use the many equally-festive alternatives available for decorations.

“Mind your décor—respect the Earth more,” said Kari Martin, Advocacy Campaign Manager, Clean Ocean Action. “Citizens can make a difference by making better choices and can help make this bill fly through the Legislature for swift passing by contacting their state legislators and signing our petition.”

With this bill announcement and introduction, COA has launched a petition that people can sign to urge the New Jersey Legislature to pass the bill. The petition signatures will be used to drive the legislation forward and as evidence of public support for the bill and a ban on balloon releases in New Jersey. To sign the petition, go to www.CleanOceanAction.org.

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