

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2024 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 715

(Delegate Griffith, *et al.*)

Environment and Transportation

Education, Energy, and the Environment

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Fishing and Hunting Licenses and Trout Stamps - Complimentary Licenses and Stamp Exemption - Veterans Determined to Be Unemployable

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This bill authorizes the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to issue a lifetime complimentary angler’s license, a lifetime complimentary Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing license, and/or a lifetime complimentary hunting license to (1) a Maryland resident who certifies that the resident is an American veteran who the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) determines is unemployable or (2) an out-of-state person who certifies that the person is an American veteran who the VA determines is unemployable and whose state of residence extends similar privileges to any Maryland resident who certifies that they are an American veteran who the VA determines is unemployable. In addition, a trout stamp is not required of a holder of a lifetime complimentary angler’s license issued under the bill. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2024.**

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** Special fund revenues likely decrease annually beginning in FY 2025 as a result of issuing lifetime complimentary licenses under the bill. The extent of any decrease cannot be reliably estimated; however, *for illustrative purposes*, special fund revenues decrease by \$7,500 to \$17,500 for every 500 licenses (angler’s, Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing, or hunter’s) that are no longer purchased for a fee by Maryland residents as a result of the bill. Expenditures are not affected.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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## Analysis

### Current Law:

#### *Lifetime Complimentary Licenses*

DNR is authorized to issue a lifetime complimentary angler's license, a lifetime complimentary Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing license, and/or a lifetime complimentary hunting license to (1) a Maryland resident who certifies that the resident is a former prisoner of war or a 100% service-connected disabled American veteran or (2) an out-of-state person who certifies that the person is a former prisoner of war or a 100% service-connected disabled American veteran whose state of residence extends similar privileges to former prisoners of war or 100% service-connected disabled American veterans of this State. A trout stamp is not required of a holder of a lifetime complimentary angler's license for former prisoners of war or 100% service-connected disabled American veterans.

#### *Recreational Fishing and Hunting Licenses*

Subject to certain exceptions:

- any person age 16 or older must secure an angler's license to fish in the nontidal waters of the State;
- a person may not fish or possess trout in an area established by DNR as an area where a trout stamp is required, unless the person first obtains a trout stamp in addition to an angler's license;
- a person may not fish for finfish in the Chesapeake Bay or in its tributaries up to tidal boundaries or in State waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the Atlantic coastal bays and their tributaries without first obtaining a Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing license or a specified registration; and
- a person may not hunt or attempt to hunt during open season and in any permitted manner any game birds and mammals in the State without first having procured either a resident or nonresident hunter's license.

The fees for annual resident angler's, Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing, and hunter's licenses are \$20.50, \$15.00, and \$35.00, respectively. The fee for a trout stamp is \$5.00 for residents. Lower fees apply for short-term and certain other licenses, and higher fees apply for annual nonresident licenses and for trout stamps for nonresidents. The annual nonresident fees for angler's, Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing, and hunter's licenses, and trout stamps, are \$30.50 (or a fee equal to the fee charged a Maryland resident by the nonresident's home state for a similar license, whichever is greater), \$22.50,

\$160.00, and \$10.00, respectively. There is no fee for a lifetime complimentary angler's license, a lifetime complimentary Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing license, or a lifetime complimentary hunting license, and, as mentioned above, a trout stamp is not required of a holder of a lifetime complimentary angler's license.

Fee revenues received from angler's licenses (and trout stamps), Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing licenses, and hunter's licenses are deposited in the Fisheries Management and Protection Fund, the Fisheries Research and Development Fund, and the Wildlife Management and Protection Fund, respectively.

**State Revenues:** Special fund revenues likely decrease annually beginning in fiscal 2025 as a result of issuing lifetime complimentary licenses to Maryland residents and out-of-state persons that are American veterans who the VA determines are unemployable. The extent of any such decrease, however, cannot be reliably estimated, since information is not available on the number of American veterans who the VA determines are unemployable that currently purchase angler's, Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing, or hunter's licenses, or will in the future, in the absence of the bill.

However, DNR indicates that there are approximately 4,000 American veterans in the State who are classified as individually unemployable, based on information obtained from the VA through the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA's [website](#) indicates that a person may be eligible for individual unemployability if they cannot hold down a steady job that supports them financially, because of their service-connected disability, and either (1) have at least one service-connected disability rated at 60% or more disabling or (2) have two or more service-connected disabilities, with at least one rated at 40% or more disabling and a combined rating of 70% or more.

*For illustrative purposes*, special fund revenues decrease by \$7,500 to \$17,500 for every 500 licenses (angler's, Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing, or hunter's) that are no longer purchased for a fee by Maryland residents because they have instead been issued a lifetime complimentary license under the bill. This illustrative estimate does not account for the possibility of out-of-state persons no longer purchasing a license for a fee as a result of the bill; however, the issuance of lifetime complimentary licenses to out-of-state persons under the bill is conditioned on the person's state of residence extending similar privileges to Maryland residents and DNR is not aware of any other states that do so.

**Additional Comments:** The Department of Legislative Services notes that the bill could be interpreted to require that, in order for an out-of-state person to qualify for a lifetime complimentary license (as an American veteran determined by the VA to be unemployable or under the existing criteria as a former prisoner of war or a 100% service connected disabled American veteran), the out-of-state person's state of residence must extend similar privileges to (1) Maryland residents who are former prisoners of war; (2) Maryland

residents who are 100% service connected disabled American veterans; *and* (3) Maryland residents who are American veterans determined by the VA to be unemployable. This analysis assumes, however, that the bill only requires that an out-of-state person's state of residence extend similar privileges to Maryland residents that meet the same criteria as the out-of-state person (*e.g.*, American veterans determined by the VA to be unemployable) in order for the out-of-state person to qualify for a lifetime complimentary license.

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### **Additional Information**

**Recent Prior Introductions:** Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

**Designated Cross File:** SB 533 (Senator Gallion) - Education, Energy, and the Environment.

**Information Source(s):** Department of Natural Resources; Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 9, 2024  
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