



THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

February 8, 2024

Ways and Means Committee

HB 447

Income Tax Credit – Venison Donation

LETTER OF INFORMATION

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), on behalf of our Maryland supporters, wanted to provide the committee with brief background and information on HB 447, *Income Tax Credit – Venison Donation*. We do not take a position on this bill but want to ensure the committee understands the context of the larger conversation around deer management in Maryland.

The HSUS, along with wildlife management professionals and sportsmen's groups, stands in firm opposition to any legislation that contravenes longstanding conservation principles to create direct payments to hunters for taking what is, has been, and must always be a public resource that is managed in the public trust. We appreciate that the sponsor of HB 447 has clarified the tax credit to more clearly link the payments to the processing and butchering costs, not the deer itself. That clarification is critically important.

The HSUS has seen – and has strenuously opposed – past attempts to commodify the harvesting of deer, or the offering of cash rewards for the killing of any wildlife. Such monetary incentives are not proven to reduce conflicts, do not target specific, problem-causing animals, and are a waste of taxpayer money and state resources. Further, the commercialization of Maryland's wildlife runs counter to longstanding principles of responsible, fair chase hunting, as well as the historic rejection of market hunting by wildlife management agencies and professionals.

The HSUS understands the challenges facing farmers in reducing deer damage to crops. We urge the farming community to work with the Department of Natural Resources to expand the implementation of exclusion and repellent techniques for reducing cervid damage, and build on existing programs for targeted, strategic deer management, especially seasonal damage to high-value crops.

This bill is targeted and limited, and we thank the sponsor for the careful drafting of HB 447. While we do not take a position on this bill, we urge the committee to review any deer hunting legislation with a critical eye for avoiding commodification of this public resource.