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Society of the United States and
Humane Society International

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Ways and Means Committee

HB 175 - Income Tax Credit - Venison Donation - Alterations

LETTER OF INFORMATION

On behalf of our Maryland supporters, Humane World for Animals would like to provide the committee with brief background and information on HB 175, Income Tax Credit – Venison Donation - Alterations. 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.

In 2024, HB 447/CH 770 and SB 440/CH 769 were enacted to create an income tax credit for expenses incurred to butcher and process meat from antlerless deer hunted in Maryland and donated to a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. This law as enacted also sets a limit of \$300 for tax credits that can be claimed under that section in any taxable year. HB 175 amends that law by striking the section with that \$300 limit on tax credits.

Humane World for Animals, 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 therefore appreciated that the sponsors of HB 447/CH 770 and SB 440/CH 769 clarified the tax credit to more clearly link the payments to the processing and butchering costs, not to the hunted deer. That clarification was critically important, and we ask that HB 175 not be amended in any way that would erode or eliminate that link.

Humane World for Animals has seen – and has strenuously opposed – past attempts to commodify the hunting 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 widely accepted standards of responsible, fair chase hunting, as well as the historic rejection of market hunting by wildlife management agencies and professionals.

We understand 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.

The law that this bill amends is targeted and limited, and we thank the sponsors of HB 175 for not changing those crucial limitations. While we do not take a position on HB 175, we urge the committee to continue to review any deer hunting legislation with a critical eye for avoiding commodification of this public resource.

For more information contact Stacey Volodin, Maryland State Director
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