

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2017 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

Senate Bill 66

(Senators Simonaire and Norman)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Environment and Transportation

**Hunter Safety Courses - Application of Requirement and Establishment of
Incentives Program**

This bill authorizes the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to adopt regulations to establish a program to provide incentives for the successful completion of a hunter safety course by individuals who are not required by law to complete such a course. The program may include discounts on hunting licenses and any other incentive that DNR determines to be appropriate. The bill also clarifies the circumstances under which a person is exempt from the requirement to obtain a certificate of competency in firearms and hunter safety; specifically, the bill codifies current practice that the following persons are exempt: (1) a person who has an affidavit that they *hunted before July 1, 1977*; and (2) a nonresident who purchases a nonresident three-day hunting license in the State to hunt wild waterfowl.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2017.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Because it is assumed that this bill applies in a limited number of cases, State finances are not materially affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law/Background: DNR is responsible for prescribing the course of instruction in competency and safety in the handling of firearms and for designating authorized instructors. In general, a person must obtain a Certificate of Competency in Firearms and Hunter Safety prior to obtaining a hunting license by successfully completing the Maryland Hunter Education Course.

There are two statutory exceptions to the requirement to obtain a Certificate of Competency in Firearms and Hunter Safety: (1) individuals who have a hunting license issued prior to July 1, 1977, or an affidavit that they had such a license; and (2) nonresidents of Maryland who purchase a hunting license in the State to hunt wild waterfowl only. In practice, DNR exempts individuals who (1) have certification that they held a hunting license prior to July 1, 1977; (2) have certification that they hunted on private property prior to July 1, 1977, and were legally exempt from purchasing a hunting license; or (3) purchase a three-day small game nonresident hunting license and only hunt waterfowl. Individuals younger than age 18 who are hunting on family property, and are not required to have a hunting license, must still have a Certificate of Competency in Firearms and Hunter Safety.

Maryland's Hunter Education Course is a minimum of 10 hours, and, according to DNR's website, most classes run 12 to 14 hours. Most courses require that individuals younger than age 14 attend with a participating adult. The course includes instruction in hunter responsibility, firearms and ammunition, firearm handling and safety, marksmanship and shooting fundamentals, principles of wildlife management, bow hunting, muzzleloader hunting, tree stand safety, safety and first aid, water safety, and Maryland legal requirements. The courses are administered by volunteers, and DNR reports that there are more than 1,100 volunteer instructors teaching more than 250 hunter education courses annually. More than 8,000 individuals take the course annually. Generally, the course is free, but students taking the course online pay a \$15 fee.

State Fiscal Effect: Because eligibility for an incentive program, if established by DNR, is limited to those individuals who are not currently required to complete the hunter safety course, DNR reports that it does not anticipate that many current hunters will take advantage of the program. DNR advises that most of the individuals who would be eligible for any such program would be at least age 50, and at age 65, a hunter is already entitled to a senior hunting license at a reduced rate. Thus, it is assumed that any incentives provided as a result of the bill apply to a limited number of individuals. Accordingly, any discounts on hunting licenses established as part of an incentive program are not anticipated to materially affect State revenues. DNR can implement an incentive program with existing resources.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources; Department of Legislative Services

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