

OPPOSE HB0863
Natural Resources - Organized Hunting Contests - Restrictions

Honorable Delegates,

I present testimony to you today in opposition of HB0863 as a furbearer hunter, as secretary of Tri-State Coonhunters Association (a club that has been in existence in Maryland since 1967), and as a Maryland State Representative of the Bluetick Breeders and Coonhunters Association (a national organization that was established in 1954 on the basis of furbearer conservation and betterment of the bluetick coonhound breed). HB0863 was introduced to specifically ban furbearer hunting contests for prizes or money. This is extremely concerning to me as a hunter and resident of Maryland. The wording of the bill is vague. No-kill chase of raccoons falls under the broad definition of hunting. The way this bill is worded could lead to a ban on even registry-sanctioned and state-permitted coonhound events (United Kennel Club (UKC), American Kennel Club (AKC), etc) as those events typically award prizes (often trophy or monetary). Winners are determined by an assigned points system based on whether or not game is seen in the tree at the end of the chase. These events are already regulated via a permit process through the Department of Natural Resources Wildlife and Heritage Service.

Fur prices have been extremely low the last few years. There aren't many coon hunters in it for pelts any more. In fact, many participate in competition hunts as an outlet for working their hounds - these dogs are highly and specially trained to do a specific job and take great enjoyment in doing that job. Several larger events are held throughout the state annually that may be in danger of being banned if this bill would pass. These events have a long history in Maryland, with some clubs being in existence for over 50 years. Under United Kennel Club sanction, the Maryland State Youth Hunt and the Maryland State Hunt are held at Cecil County Hounds and Sportsmen Club. The youth hunt has facilitated the introduction of many youth to the outdoors and hunting. The MD State Bluetick Breeders & Coonhunters Association Hunt and a Regional Qualifying Event for the UKC World Hunt & Show are held at Tri-State Coonhunters Association. These large events have drawn hunters from surrounding states including PA, WV, OH, DE, VA and NJ. Several other national breed association sponsored special events are also held through the Treeing Walker Breeders and Fanciers Association, United English Breeders & Fanciers, and the National Redbone Coonhound Association. These events are a great way to introduce new people to hunting and furbearers. We have frequently had spectators accompany us on casts who have never been on a coon hunt before, and especially welcome youth. Some of these events draw 30 or more dogs each whose handlers all have to spend money here in Maryland to eat, buy gas and stay in hotels. Resident hunters are all buying hunting licenses every year and some hunters from adjacent states purchase Maryland hunting licenses and furbearer permits to train their hounds here especially where clubs and members are in close proximity to state lines. Again, these are no-kill events that would still be in danger of being eliminated based on the vague wording of this bill.

Many of the furbearer harvest contests where game *are* taken often help to remove nuisance animals (especially those causing harm to people, pets and livestock). When hunting for a big coon contest, I hunt the places where coon are a problem first and many other hunters do the

same. This can be a great service to farmers and landowners, and they are often requesting us to help them take care of their nuisance furbearer problems. Harvest contests provide an added incentive when hunters might otherwise not take furbearers due to low fur value. All of this is important in keeping populations in check and limiting the spread of diseases such as rabies, leptosporosis, and distemper. These diseases can be transmitted to people and domestic animals. Harvest contests are held during DNR's established harvest seasons. In reality, there is no difference in these and any other legal event where money or prizes are awarded to winners. The fact that there are no daily or season bag limits for common contest species such as coyote, fox and coon lead me to believe there is no resource concern that populations will be reduced to low levels as a result of harvesting. In fact, it suggests the exact opposite! Furbearer hunters are more important than the proponents of this bill may realize.

We cannot allow our furbearer hunting to be degraded in this state. I believe wildlife management should be left in the hands of biologists rather than the legislature. In a time where the DNR- Wildlife & Heritage Service is focusing on recruiting, retaining and re-training hunters, this bill seeks to do the exact opposite by discouraging hunters who are helping to remove nuisance predators.

Thank you for considering my comments on this issue.

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