

**Testimony in Support of HB 863: Bill to Ban Organized Hunting Contests**

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House Environment & Transportation Committee

My name is Harriett Crosby and I'm testifying in support of HB 863. I'm here today as a Maryland resident; the owner of Fox Haven Farm and president of Fox Haven Learning Center located in Jefferson, Maryland; and I'm also here representing Project Coyote and our Maryland supporters.

Project Coyote is a nonprofit that promotes compassionate conservation and coexistence with wildlife. Our science advisory board includes some of the most renowned canid and conservation experts in the world. Those board members prepared a statement condemning killing contests on scientific and ethical grounds which has now been signed by more than 70 prominent conservation scientists. Three of those scientists are local and have submitted written testimony in support of HB 863. They could not be present today so I will outline some of the ecological reasons to ban killing contests.

**Let me state outright: there is no credible scientific evidence that indiscriminately killing coyotes serves any legitimate wildlife management purpose.** In fact, the best available, peer-reviewed science shows that indiscriminately killing coyotes is counterproductive and a threat to healthy ecosystems.

**Killing contests ignore the valuable role that all wild animals play in our environment.** Coyotes, for example, provide a range of free ecological services — indirectly helping to control disease transmission, keep rodent populations in check, consume animal carcasses, increase biodiversity, remove sick animals from the gene pool, and protect crops.

**Killing contests participants often perpetuate three myths to justify their events.** These claims do not stand up to science.

**FIRST, killing contests will not permanently reduce coyote populations and may have the opposite effect.** Lethal control of coyotes stimulates increases in their populations by disrupting their social structure, which encourages more breeding and migration. It can also increase pup survival due to reduced competition for food and habitat.

**SECOND, wildlife killing contests will not prevent conflicts with humans, pets or livestock—and may increase them.** Exploited coyote populations tend to have younger, less experienced coyotes that haven't been taught appropriate hunting behaviors. These coyotes are more likely to prey on easy targets like livestock or pets. Killing contests also do not target specific, problem-causing coyotes who have become habituated by human-provided attractants.

**THIRD, indiscriminate killing of coyotes will not boost the abundance of game species like deer or pheasants.** Rather than focusing on any one species, coyotes are opportunists who eat a diverse diet. Rabbits and rodents are generally their top choice. The Pennsylvania Game Commission has emphatically stated that “[predators] don't compete with our hunters for game” and “to pretend that predator control

can return small game hunting to the state is a false prophecy.” The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission similarly found that, “while predation on adult deer has been documented, it is uncommon, and hunter harvest remains as the primary source of adult [deer] mortality in hunted populations.” Habitat protection is the most important factor for increasing the abundance of game species.

The best way to minimize conflicts with wildlife in urban and rural settings is prevention and education, not lethal control.

In closing, I urge you to support HB 863. Science tells us that killing contests are ecologically destructive, and do not serve the goals that contest participants tout. But more than that, killing contests are ethically indefensible. They are a bloodsport like dogfighting or cockfighting, and they don’t belong in our state.

Thank you.