January 13, 2021

Re: VETERINARY SUPPORT for HB 293/SB 200, prohibiting wildlife killing contests in Maryland

Dear Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

We are writing on behalf of the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA) in support of HB 293/SB 200 to prohibit wildlife killing contests in Maryland.

HSVMA is a nationwide association of approximately 9,000 veterinary professionals—including approximately 200 Maryland members—with a focus on the health and welfare of all animals, including free-roaming wildlife.

Veterinarians stand among the staunchest defenders of animal health and well-being. We work daily to minimize the pain and suffering that animals experience. One way we do that is by supporting policies that minimize the cruelty intentionally inflicted upon animals by humans. And it is hard to imagine a more callous disregard for animal suffering than that displayed in wildlife killing contests, in which participants vie for cash and prizes for killing the most, the heaviest, or sometimes even the smallest animals within a specified time period.

We were horrified to see footage of an undercover investigation by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) of killing contests right here in Maryland. The footage shows participants bringing in hundreds of dead animals and piling them up for counting or weighing, while children play among the bodies and help drag them in. Some of the animals have gruesome injuries and are ripped apart by bullets. Killing contest participants often use electronic calling devices, which mimic the sound of prey or even coyote or fox young in distress, to lure animals in for an easy shot by a high-powered rifle.

Indiscriminately killing large numbers of animals for prizes is fundamentally inhumane. The random and indiscriminate killing of species like foxes and coyotes can cause the orphaning of dependent kits or pups, who are left to succumb to exposure, predation, or a slow and excruciating death by starvation. As veterinary medical professionals, we can attest that the agony endured by wild animals from this type of death is no different than that experienced by our own companion animals.

Additionally, in online forums, social media posts, and videos, participants have been known to gloat about "gut shot" animals, particularly when referring to coyotes. "Gut shots" are evidence of poor shot placement likely resulting from

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the incentives in wildlife killing contests to kill as many animals as possible in a specific time period. Before succumbing to these gruesome injuries, "gut shot" animals must endure unimaginable suffering, all for nothing more than the contest participant's chance at a cash prize.

Wildlife killing contests are cruel, wasteful, unsporting, and do not reflect the values of most Marylanders, nor do they comport with our state's ethical hunting principles of sportsmanship, fair chase, and respect for wildlife. With this in mind, the HSVMA asks for your support of HB 293/SB 200 to end these cruel and grisly contests in Maryland. Thank you for your time and your leadership on behalf of animals.

Sincerely,

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