



February 10, 2021

House Bill 594

Prohibition on Sale of Wildlife - Local Venison Donation Programs - Application House Environment & Transportation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

House Bill 594 would clarify that venison from a lawfully harvested white-tailed deer that is donated to a county administered venison donation program for distribution to a non-profit food bank or food pantry is not subject to the state prohibition on sale, barter, or exchange of game animals.

This past fall, Anne Arundel County, in conjunction with the Anne Arundel Economic Development Corporation (“EDC”), set up a program to address two problems that had grown more severe as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. More of our residents required the assistance of the Anne Arundel County Food Bank, and donations to the food bank were way down. Donations of high protein, low fat meats like venison were especially needed.

Utilizing \$200,000 in CARES Act funding, we set up a program under which hunters could donate lawfully harvested deer to the food bank. Under our program, hunters brought deer to one of the participating processors, who then processed the deer and packaged the venison for donation to the food bank. We covered the \$100 cost of processing each deer and reimbursed the hunter \$50 for their expenses. DNR believed our program violated state law, while our Office of Law wrote an opinion that maintained that it was legal. This bill settles that disagreement.

We fully support the important work that DNR does to manage wildlife populations. We support the bag limits that are established across the state to prevent over-hunting, but farmers, insurance companies, environmental advocates, and public health experts all note that the growth in the deer population throughout DNR Region B (all of Maryland except the three westernmost counties) is creating a level of destruction that cannot be sustained.

Sunday hunting, increased bag limits, Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry, crop damage permits, authorization for county-funded managed hunts, and tax credits for hunters to cover part of the processing fees have all been implemented by the General Assembly and DNR with the stated purpose of reducing the overpopulation of deer in Region B. Despite these efforts, farmers throughout central Maryland and the Eastern Shore still report more crop damage than ever, and insurance companies report an increase in auto accidents caused by deer. When a county is willing to innovate the way Anne Arundel has, they should be encouraged, as long as the programs comply with DNR bag limits and other restrictions.

This Bill does not commercialize hunting. It does not allow for the commercial sale of venison between private parties or in public exchanges. What it does do is allow a county to establish a program very similar to Farmers and Hunters Feeding The Hungry, whereby hunters can donate lawfully harvested deer to a food bank or food pantry at no cost to themselves, and provide for some of our neediest residents.

For those reasons, I urge a FAVORABLE report on House Bill 594.

Sincerely,

Steuart Pittman