



Larry Hogan, Governor
Boyd Rutherford, Lt. Governor
Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, Secretary

February 10, 2021

The Honorable Kumar Barve
Chair, Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Dana Stein
Vice Chair, Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

***Re: Letter of Information – House Bill 594 – Prohibition on Sale of Wildlife
– Local Venison Donation Programs – Application***

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources provides the following information on House Bill 594. This bill would make it legal for hunters to receive payment for killing deer.

Current state law prohibits the sale, exchange or barter of deer meat. The bill, as drafted and by its short title, eliminates those prohibitions and allows hunters to receive cash, prizes or other incentives to kill deer. The concept of paying or otherwise incentivizing hunters to kill game has long been inconsistent with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Indeed, most legislatures banned the payment of bounties decades ago in order to avoid the pitfalls of monetizing wildlife. Maryland's prohibition on bounties remains in place today, but this bill, despite its good intentions, simply opens a legal door for counties to pay hunters to kill.

Notwithstanding the increased risk for ecosystem imbalance borne of bounties, there are substantial risks to public safety. While incentivizing the killing of deer may motivate a few legitimate hunters to participate, history demonstrates placing a price on the head of a game animal is substantially more attractive to the poacher. The illegal actor is going to be moved to kill game illegally, often at night and, almost always close to residential development where deer populations are accessible and available in larger numbers. Poachers have no incentive today to take the risks associated with shooting at night in residential settings; this bill creates that incentive by putting a cash or monetary incentive on the head of every dead deer.

Venison donation programs have existed for decades without the necessity of paying for the killing of the deer. Hunters as a group are willing to share in their harvest and have

historically supported the many voluntary options available to support feeding the hungry without being paid for wanton killing.

The department takes seriously its mission to ensure white-tailed deer are managed in Maryland at levels that minimize deer-vehicle collisions, crop damage, landscaping and yard damage, as well as damage to natural habitats. It is clear that there is a strong desire from the bill's sponsor and others to look at more innovative policies adopted across the nation that could benefit Maryland. Please know that DNR has committed to take on this task during the 2021 Interim in conjunction with its federal, state and local partners as well as other vested stakeholders.

Thank you for allowing the department to provide the above information regarding HB 594 for the committee's careful consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

James W. McKitrick
Director, Legislative and Constituent Services