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Budget and Taxation Committee

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Chair, Public Safety,
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Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area

Chair, Joint Subcommittee on
Program Open Space/Agricultural
Land Preservation

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 15, 2023

Testimony in Favor of SB0327
Hunting, Wildlife Conservation, and Outdoor Recreation - Funding, Promotion,
Management, Licenses, Permits, and Stamps

Chairman Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, & members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 327, which updates our hunting and preservation laws with the intended goal of expanding hunting opportunities, controlling deer populations, and preserving land. I am proud of the work and the variety of stakeholders that this legislation has engaged over the past few months, and I am hopeful that this Committee sees this legislation as a thoughtful, well-balanced approach.

On community outreach for hunting and conservation this legislation codifies the current Wildlife Conservation, Education, and Outreach program within DNR. This newly codified program will provide outreach to communities that have historically not had access to hunting and conservation programs as well as further engage veterans as it relates to these activities. (Page 3 Lines 23-28 and Page 4 Lines 1-16)

On hunting license/stamp fees this legislation will, at the request of the hunting community, take a measured approach in increasing the fees to purchase a hunting license/stamp – which have not been raised since 1989. These increases not only keep us on par with our neighboring States but also, by way of Federal Pittman-Robertson Funds, generate approximately an additional \$6.8 million more Federal dollars to our State. This legislation will also grant non-resident students attending in State schools the resident price for the differing licenses/stamps. The increases will still keep Maryland competitive when compared to our neighboring states - Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Virginia all have an average resident cost of

\$67.08 while this legislation proposes an average resident cost of \$53.50. (Page 8 Lines 22-31 and Page 9 Lines 1-20)

On the increased federal funds the State will receive this legislation will:

1. Authorize the use of the increased federal funds to be transferred to the Heritage Conservation Fund to be used to purchase lands that can be used by the General Public for hunting. (Page 3 Lines 21-22 and Page 12 Lines 22-24)
2. Create 8 new pins in the Wildlife Conservation, Education, and Outreach Program to further support their outreach efforts. (Page 12 Lines 25-28)
3. Authorize the use of funds to be spent on migratory game bird habitat restoration in Canada – which 36 other States currently do. The legislation will also require a report on the effectiveness of any such expenditures to the General Assembly. (Page 10 Lines 27-30 and Page 11 Lines 4-9)
4. Require DNR to report on any suitable uses for the increased federal funding. (Page 12 Lines 13-14)

On deer and the impact that they continue to have on Marylanders and our farmers this legislation will:

1. Require DNR, in consultation with MDA, to develop a plan to address the overpopulation of deer in the State – including the feasibility of a closure strategy on State parks, State lands, and local lands consultation with our local partners to mitigate deer populations. (Page 12 Lines 1-17)
2. Creates, for the first time, a stamp to hunt Sika Deer (Various pages)

On the liability of private landowners who allow specific individuals, rather than the public at large to hunt on their property this legislation will further clarify [CH523](#) (2022) to ensure that nothing may be construed to:

1. Require a landowner to allow the general public access to the land owners land; and
2. Prohibit a landowner from limiting or posting the landowner's land against entry.

On Sunday hunting for migratory game birds this legislation, as drafted, would authorize the hunting of migratory game birds on Sundays. It is important to note that, based on the seasons for geese and ducks, this would only account for 8 to 10 Sundays a year. However, appreciating that counties and communities are different and after meeting with the Maryland Horse Council, I am proposing the following as a potential amendment that will give our Counties 3 options with regards to this:

1. A County may opt out of this all together and lose that day for the hunting season.
2. A County may choose to only offer Sunday hunting for migratory game birds from 30 minutes before sunrise to 12:00PM.

3. If not explicitly listed as opting out or for a 12:00PM end time, then the County would be granting full Sunday hunting.

This is obviously an omnibus piece of legislation. While there is still work to be done to finesse the Sunday hunting piece, I look forward to working with the Horse Council and local delegations to determine which counties would like to opt-in or opt-out of Sunday hunting of waterfowl.

Once again, I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 327 – and I look forward to hearing from the Committee.

Sincerely,

Sarah Elfreth