

TO: Sen. Brian Feldman and the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support with Amendments to SB 497

Dear Chairman Feldman and Committee Members,

I write today to support Senate Bill 327 with amendments. This bill would modify the licensing system for hunting and trapping and increase funding available to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). While I support the overall intention of this bill, I would like to see it amended as I describe below.

The DNR is responsible for managing our State's wildlife resources and relies a great deal on license revenue to do so. The increase to license fees is long overdue as it has been far too long since license fees have changed and as we all know, costs for the government to do its job have gone up just as costs for all of us in every aspect of our lives have gone up. The DNR needs additional funding simply to provide the same level of service. Furthermore, I believe that hunters across the State will ultimately see the benefit of increasing funding. My hope is that DNR will use the additional funds to find ways to provide additional hunting opportunities. States in the West have programs such as Block Management Areas, or Walk-In Hunting Areas, which provide private landowners compensation for allowing the general public access to hunt the property. Such a program would be incredibly welcomed here in Maryland.

While I support the intention of this bill, I do hope that it gets amended in two specific ways. First, all other license holder groups are seeing increases to their fees but for seniors. Seniors already pay a nominal fee compared to other license holders. Leaving the senior license at \$5 while other resident license holder groups (including youth) see license increases of at least 40% simply isn't fair. A commensurate increase would put the senior license at \$9. Rounding up to a round number would be \$10. Many people spend that much on gas just getting to their hunting grounds and back. It isn't too much to ask to increase the senior license by \$5, especially as many hunters continue to age into that license bracket.

Second, I love the creation of the sika deer stamp but the nonresident sika deer stamp needs to be more expensive. Free range, wild sika deer are an incredibly unique resource to our State and their pursuit has exploded in popularity over the last number of years. Folks come from all over the East Coast and further to pursue these marsh ghosts. Providing an open access, come-one, come-all opportunity for nonresidents to hunt sika deer is incredibly generous. Out West, unique opportunities like this are often managed by draw systems, limiting nonresidents to specific numbers to provide enhanced opportunities for residents. Furthermore, license fees for such unique opportunities are often in the neighborhood of 25:1 nonresident:resident (such as in Montana - \$959 for a nonresident elk/deer license vs. \$36 for a resident elk/deer license). I don't believe we need to increase license fees by that much for nonresidents, but \$25 is simply not enough to really capture the value offered by our great State to nonresidents.

Again, I want to reiterate my support for the overall intention of Senate Bill 327 and I sincerely hope to see it amended as I have described to further fund DNR's activities to conserve, protect, and enhance the management of our State's wildlife resources.

Sincerely,

Jacob Holtz