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Senate Bill 779 - Natural Resources - Female Deer Hunting Contests - Authorization

Committee: Education, Energy and Environment

MGPA Position: SUPPORT

The Maryland Grain Producers Association (MGPA) serves as the voice of grain farmers growing corn, wheat, barley and sorghum across the state. MGPA supports Senate Bill 779 which would allow the Department of Natural Resources to allow deer harvest contests in the month of January for the purpose of population control.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service estimates that farmers experience over \$10 million in crop damage annually with 75% of that being attributed to deer. Maryland's deer population was estimated to be just over 200,000 white-tailed deer and 10,000 sika deer in 2022. The density of deer to suitable habitat in Maryland is high and therefore causes conflict with not only farmers and their crops but also vehicles and homeowners. Responsible hunting is the best way to control deer over-population.

[Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry](#) is a program where hunters can participate can donate harvested deer for processing and the deer meat is then donated to Maryland Food Bank and participating food pantries. This is primarily funded by the agriculture community. Each deer donated gives the donor an entry into a drawing for mostly hunting gear related give-a-ways.

Another program started by the agriculture community are local Doe Harvest Challenges. County Farm Bureaus and grain producers host a 3-day doe harvest challenge and each antlerless deer checked in enters the hunter in to a cash drawing. If the hunter chooses to donate the deer, it is processed free of charge (paid for my farmers and agribusinesses) and again, donated to food banks and pantries.

House Bill 863 was passed in 2020 which prohibited "killing contests" for fur-bearing animals. During the 2020 session, Maryland Grain Producers Association worked with the bill sponsor to clarify and were assured that this did not impact white-tailed deer and therefore would not prohibit the doe harvest contests.

However, over the last few years, the contests have been scrutinized by the Department of Natural Resources as a violation to Section 10-404 which prohibits the sale, exchange or barter of wild game and we are hoping for official clarification to allow them to continue. MGPA worked with the sponsor to move the language to the correct section of the code and an amendment is forthcoming.

MGPA respectfully requests your favorable report on Senate Bill 779.