



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Acting Secretary

January 25, 2023

BILL NUMBER: SB 91 - First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources – Apprentice Hunting License – Alterations

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Department supports SB 91 because it expands hunting opportunities for junior hunters in Maryland. Hunting remains a critical tool for wildlife management, particularly for abundant species like white-tailed deer. Hunter numbers have significantly declined across the country over the past 50 years. Most states, including Maryland, have invested in various recruitment, retention and reactivation (R3) programs to stabilize hunter numbers and hopefully reverse the declining trend. Recruiting and retaining junior hunters is an important component in these programs, and SB 91 would assist with these efforts.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Apprentice hunting licenses are common throughout the United States. Maryland instituted its apprentice license in 2017. Since that time, thousands of new junior and adult hunters have taken advantage of the program. However, one complaint often heard is that juniors can only acquire an apprentice license for one hunting year. When that license expires, they must take a full hunter safety course and acquire a regular Maryland junior hunting license. Unfortunately, some juniors are not ready for a full hunting license or, due to timing of hunter education courses offered (which can be limited due to availability of volunteer instructors), are not able to complete the necessary requirements in time to obtain a full license during the next season. In these instances, the junior is forced to not hunt for an entire season, and there is a greater risk that the junior will lose interest in pursuing hunting in the future.

BILL EXPLANATION

SB 91 would enable junior hunters to obtain an apprentice hunting license in subsequent years (through age 16) so that they could continue hunting. Apprentice license holders are required to be directly supervised by a licensed hunter and must complete an online hunter safety course before obtaining the license. The bill requires that this safety course is taken each year that the junior hunter wants to acquire an apprentice license. The hunter would then need to obtain the traditional hunter education certification before purchasing a regular hunting license.

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