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Education, Energy, and
the Environment Committee

Executive Nominations Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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The Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
SB 824 – Worcester County – Natural Resources – Hunting
Statement of Support by Bill Sponsor Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Thank you, Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and my fellow members of the distinguished Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee for allowing me to present Senate Bill 824 – Worcester County – Natural Resources – Hunting.

This is a local bill that would add Worcester County to the list of five Maryland Counties that are allowed to hunt game birds and game mammals on each Sunday during the open season designated by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, which includes Allegany, Cecil, Garrett, St. Mary's, and Washington counties. This bill also decreases the archery hunting "safety zone" in Worcester County from 150 yards to 50 yards from an occupied dwelling or camp, aligning with the archery "safety zone" laws in Allegany, Calvert, Carroll, Cecil, Frederick, Garrett, Harford, Montgomery, St. Mary's, and Washington counties.

This legislation would give Worcester County families more time to hunt during a limited season for game bird and game mammals and simply provide Worcester County hunters the same benefits of several other counties in the State. While game bird and game mammals are regulated by the State, this would not include migratory waterfowl since they are regulated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The vast majority of hunters work throughout the week so their only chance to help balance game bird and game mammal populations is on the weekend.

Populations of white-tail deer have risen dramatically in response to a lack of natural predators and protective game laws, leading to a severe loss in forest diversity, more vehicular accidents, and crop damage. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation there are between 1-2 million animal collisions a year, resulting in 200 human deaths, tens of thousands of injuries, and more than \$8 billion in vehicle damages. In 2018, an estimated 11,184 deer were killed by cars in just Maryland alone. These types of accidents are more likely to occur specifically with white-tail deer on long stretches of busy rural roads.

Crop damage is also a major economic concern for our farmers on the Eastern Shore. Deer do not have upper incisors, so they do not make a clean cut when they browse a plant, leaving tooth marks in crops as well as forest plants that eventually lead to rot. It is estimated that crop damage caused by deer costs nearly \$50 per acre, and these numbers are even higher on the Eastern Shore.

Allowing Sunday hunting on certain Wildlife Management Areas leased to private hunting clubs would increase opportunity to harvest deer and decrease the damage they cause. These Wildlife Management Areas are large, densely wooded, and inaccessible to many other outdoor activities, including horseback riding. Further, the hunting tracts and horse trails are largely separate in Worcester County as the public land where hunting occurs is leased to the hunting clubs during hunting season. Horseback riders are not restricted by Maryland law and can already enjoy all fifty-two Sundays every year. We are just asking for our hunters to be allowed to use their own hunting trails during the open season designated by the Department of Natural Resources.

Regarding the archery “safety zone” provision, archery is considered one of the safest means of hunting. The distance for taking an ethical shot is greatly reduced compared to traditional firearms as it is imperative to have a clear view of the target because something as small as a branch or even a vine can interfere with the flight of an arrow. Archery requires patience, precision, and timing to execute a clean shot, meaning that archers survey their surroundings fully and intently before ever releasing the arrow. And while bows have a range that is farther than 50 yards, they are most accurate, and therefore safest, within 50 yards.

I truly appreciate your kind attention and consideration, and I respectfully ask for a swift and favorable report on SB 824.