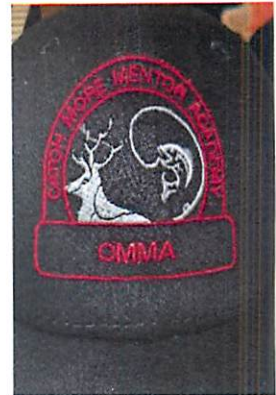


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Michael Smith Testimony for House Bill 983

My name is Michael Smith and I have been part of the Wildlife Programs for over fifty years. I have perfected my skills in both small and big game hunting along with fishing and other wildlife. In the African American community, most of the farmland is gone and the opportunity to gain access to other hunting grounds is nearly impossible. If something isn't done within the next few years, I believe the African American hunters will become extinct.

It's a foregone conclusion that I found that minorities (especially African Americans) don't have access or knowledge of the many services that are available in wildlife sports. However, I must admit that due to my association with other hunting groups, I have had the opportunity to witness what is actually available to all hunters.

In 2021 I contacted one of Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commissioners (Warren Fleming who is with me today) to see how this oversight could be improved. I introduced a concept to Mr. Fleming that there should be a mentorship program in Montgomery County that will provide training in small game hunting, gun safety, target shooting, first time hunters, classroom training and field training to minorities and other hunting groups. This program will also include the art fishing techniques. This program has been approved with the help of Mr. Fleming and a pilot program is scheduled to start in April of this year. We have built a bridge that could be used to connect the youth to the techniques of hunting by providing a platform that will connect to the community.

During my years of hunting, I have mentored many youths and first-time hunters, and when I attended the R3 Program this year, I was so impressed to see and hear that the Department of Natural Resources recognized the disparities found in the minority community related to wildlife participation.

It is imperative that Bill 0983 be passed so that the sport of hunting can continue and the many citizens who love this sport get a fair share of the services that are available.

MICHAEL SMITH
Michael Smith
PRESIDENT C.M.M.A.