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Environment and Transportation
Committee

Subcommittees

Housing and Real Property

Local Government and
Bi-County Agencies

Natural Resources,
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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Testimony in Favor of HB0983

Hunting, Wildlife Conservation, and Outdoor Recreation - Funding, Promotion, Management, Licenses, Permits, and Stamps

Chairman Barve, Vice-Chair Stein, and members of the finest committee in the General Assembly, thank you for having me.

For the record, my name is Delegate Nick Allen, and I am here to testify in support of House Bill 983, which updates our hunting and wildlife conservation laws with the intended goal of expanding hunting and conservation opportunities, controlling deer populations, and preserving land.

I'm proud to sponsor this bill for a number of reasons, but partially because I am a hunter. Really, I am what is called a "late onset hunter". I discovered the joy of hunting only recently, in my late 20s, but I wish I had the opportunity to learn about and enjoy the sport earlier in my life. I also consider myself a nature lover and an animal lover. And, again, I wish I hadn't waited until I was almost 30 to learn that those things are NOT contradictory, and that hunters are typically the largest financial contributors to habitat conservation in the United States.

House Bill 983 does a lot of different things, and a lot of great things for wildlife and conservation in Maryland. It is 12 pages long, and is, by far, the longest bill for which I am the primary sponsor this session.

This bill will provide outreach and education to communities that have historically lacked access to hunting and conservation programs. It will codify a first-ever program to reach underserved communities to engage them in wildlife conservation, stewardship, and safe and ethical hunting education. This program is historic, possibly the first in the country that is focused on these communities and helping them to get involved in conservation and nature.

The bill will also, at the request of the hunting community, take a measured approach to increasing the licensing and stamp fees in Maryland, which will bring us closer in line with the other states in the area, while still keeping us competitive and still cheaper, on average, than Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Virginia. Doing this will also allow Maryland to take advantage of increased federal funding through the Pittman-Robertson Act, generating an additional 6.8 million dollars that will go towards conservation and these other programs.

I also want to note that these fees have not been increased in Maryland since 1989—which, for the record, is the year before I was born.

This bill also establishes a new stamp to hunt the Sika deer, a species unique to Maryland within the United States and a major attraction for many to visit our state.

Despite all this, I know that most of the discussion we will have about this 12-page bill will probably center on a single line within it. I think we all already know what I'm talking about: Sunday hunting.

As a result, I am prepared to address these concerns head-on and let my friends on this incredibly diverse panel elaborate further on the other remarkable things this bill will do and the many people and communities that will benefit from it.

If you think 1989 was a long time ago, let me point out that the prohibition on Sunday hunting in Maryland dates back to 1723, not during the reign of King Charles I, Delegate Holmes, but close—during the reign of King George I.

It is important to note that the Sunday hunting provision of this bill is narrow: it applies ONLY to migratory game birds— primarily geese and ducks—and allows for each county to opt in or out of this provision, or, if they choose, allow hunting before noon on Sundays. We included this portion because we acknowledge that not all of Maryland's counties are the same.

The fact that this bill applies only to migratory game birds means several things:

First, it only applies to a short season. In this case, we are talking about hunting on a grand total of 8-10 Sundays per year, out of 52 weeks. Additionally, the team at the Maryland Department of Natural Resources is one of the best in the world, and they are confident that this change will not negatively affect the populations of these species.

Second, it will help avoid conflict between hunters and equestrians. Most hunters hunt migratory game birds near water, or on the water, and in other areas where horse trails typically do not run. Additionally,

an ideal day for a duck or goose hunter is the opposite of an ideal day for an equestrian—ducks and geese prefer cooler, cloudy, rainy days.

Finally, there is a level of safety inherent in restricting this to bird hunting. Rather than using rifles and bullets that can travel long distances, bird hunters hunt exclusively with bird shot, which is small in size, dissipates rapidly after a short distance and, even if it manages to travel a couple hundred feet, is not typically dangerous outside of that effective range of 150 feet.

Ultimately, here is what I believe to be the real benefit of this provision of the bill (which is, I will remind you, a single line out of 12 pages).

Expanding migratory bird hunting to Sundays essentially doubles the number of opportunities for students and working people to hunt migratory birds. Currently, unless someone misses a day of work, or a student misses a day of school, they can only hunt geese and ducks eight days out of the year. That is it. What we are proposing is increasing that number from eight to 16.

The proponents of this bill are average, working Marylanders who are busy people, but they have taken the time to line up in support of this bill despite the increase in fees to participate. They are doing so in part because they believe they're getting more in return—including more weekends to enjoy the outdoors.

Thank you, all, for your time. I respectfully request a favorable report and I look forward to answering all of your questions about House Bill 983.

Sincerely,
Delegate Nick Allen
District 8