

SB0181 Lead Ammunition Phase Out

OPPOSE SB0181

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Committee Members,

I have been a Maryland hunter for decades; I am a member of Deer management with 2 counties, and a DNR trained Maryland Hunter Education instructor.

Key Take Aways

Impossible to enact/enforce:

Adding the section that allows The DNR to "Authorize the use of lead ammo if Non-lead ammo is not commercially available for a caliber/weapon" will not work as they think it will. This is just another example of the crafters of these legislative attempts that have no concept of Firearms, ballistics or hunting.

Education and outreach has a high rate voluntary use of non-lead ammunition, While mandates shuts many hunters out:

Arizona and other states have partnered with nationwide conservation groups and have had a high rate of hunters using copper ammunition where it works, up to 80 percent.

SB0181 contains many fallacies and unproven guesses.

"Peer reviewed studies" are mentioned multiple times,, with no mention of the actual studies,, And often mentioning a study subject that has nothing to do with lead hunting projectiles. There is not a single study that shows lead poisoning from eating deer meat.

Bald Eagles in the Chesapeake region have gone from ~60 breeding pairs in 1970s to over 3000 pairs in 2020, in fact they are at or above carrying capacity in many areas.

Maryland's own DNR released a report on July 3rd 2025

"A Soaring Success: Maryland's Bald Eagle Population Recovery"

Without a single mention of lead in the entire report.

<https://news.maryland.gov/dnr/2025/07/03/a-soaring-success-marylands-bald-eagle-population-recovery/>

You can eliminate all perceived lead contamination from deer hunting by having the hunters remove/bury the gut pile when they remove the entire deer from the woods. This is a No Cost solution to the cash strapped state.

DETAILS

Education

Conservation is most effective when it's led by those who know the land, the wildlife, and the Firearms best—hunters, conservationists, Wildlife biologists.

The last 2 years I have requested that MD enact a policy of education and outreach to teach hunters about non lead alternatives, where they work, and where they do not.

There are national groups of hunters specializing in the promotion of Lead-free ammunition for hunting. They are achieving up to an 80% rate of hunters voluntarily switching to lead-free bullets. And this is in the infancy of these programs and the copper bullet market.

And yet Maryland legislators lead by national anti-hunting groups continue to ignore these options and push blanket bans that would cut many hunters out.

These are programs that would cost the State zero dollars,, and yet the sponsors of these MD bills ignore these options.

<https://www.leadfreepartnership.org/about>

<https://www.fws.gov/press-release/2025-09/voluntary-lead-free-ammunition-incentive-program-2025-2026-hunting-season>

<https://www.kjzz.org/kjzz-news/2024-10-27/arizona-hunters-aid-california-condor-recovery-efforts-through-lead-free-ammunition-program>

Enforcement and mandates

SB0181 includes the section: *“THE DEPARTMENT SHALL AUTHORIZE THE USE OF LEAD AMMUNITION FOR MUZZLELOADERS, HANDGUNS, RIFLES, AND SHOTGUNS IF NONLEAD AMMUNITION IS NOT COMMERCIALY AVAILABLE FOR THE SPECIFIC WEAPON.”*

This is both not enforceable, and not practical. Just because there is ONE non-lead cartridge available for a caliber rifle that does not guarantee that it will function in that rifle. A perfect example is the 44mag rifle. Up to the 1990s 44mag rifles typ had a 1:38 twist barrel, in the mid 1990s the manufactures switched to a faster 1:20 twist to stabilize longer bullets. The newer 44 mag rifles may stabilize the longer copper bullets, the older

1:38 twist will not. It typically takes a hunter trying multiple brands of ammunition to find one that works in their particular rifle. How is DNR going to be able to regulate what ammo will function properly in whose rifle?? ,, They are not.

Vagueness and assumptions in SB0181

500 peer-reviewed studies about lead exposure, but no references to the actual studies, or what form of lead (Inorganic? Organic? Metallic?)

What do individuals working at an indoor range have to do with lead hunting projectiles?

The Shattering lead bullets – what brand/model bullet, what velocity, what range?

Deer meat consumed by humans – again, link the study,, it does not exist.

Bald Eagles are being poisoned by Maryland's refusal to clean up the lead pollution from industrial and military sites.

Bald Eagles

As noted above, The Bald Eagle population in the Chesapeake region has gone from ~60 breeding pairs in 1970s to over 3000 pair in 2020.

(The following are clips from a "Bay Journal article and WTOP Melissa Howell interview) According to Bryan Watts, founder and director of the Center for Conservation Biology at Virginia's College of William and Mary, who has authored dozens of academic papers on bald eagles over a more than 30-year career:

"Eagles have shown themselves to be more adaptable than we expected," But now, he says, they seem to be running out of room in the Bay region. The most notable consequence has been the growing population of so-called "floaters," breeding-age eagles of either sex with no territory of their own. The crowding has become so intense that researchers now believe that the floater population is six to eight times greater than the breeding population. Breeding males that do have nests and mates find themselves at near-constant threat of losing them to intruders. "These things can be bloody fights to the death". "It's a jungle out there for these birds." "Food supply for eagles hasn't been able to keep up and infighting has become common, the professor said. Watts added that the population began to reach its limits". "The young were starving in the nest,"

Lead is present in many aspects of the Chesapeake Bay, It is in the sediment base, it is in the fish the Eagles eat, A major source is the paint in the bridges over/around the bay, often where Eagles perch/nest, It comes from runoff from active industrial sites and military installations that are prevalent in the bay region.

Eagles exposure to lead is not primarily from hunters.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30698866/>

Summary:

SB0181 is not enforceable and if it was, it would cut many hunters off from hunting with their weapons, as a wide range of viable copper Ammo is not yet available for all weapons.

There are no Reports of lead poisoning from eating deer meat shot with lead projectiles, and there are no studies linking lead in eagles to deer hunter's bullets.

There is a National organization that helps States with "Education and incentive" based transition to lead free hunting ammunition – "North American Lead Free Partnership", This is a route the state could take that would cost zero dollars and achieve a 80% compliance in the first few years, giving the market time to mature and provide product to the hunters. <https://www.leadfreepartnership.org/about>

For these reasons I OPPOSE SB0181

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