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THE HONORABLE BRIAN J. FELDMAN

Chair, Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

HONORABLE MEMBERS

RE: WITH AMENDMENT, SUPPORT FOR HOUSE BILL 643 (Natural Resources – Hunting -- Management)

The HUNTERS OF MARYLAND, LLC represent the interests of Maryland’s hunting community at both the State and local level. Few realize that hunters underwrite 100% of all wildlife management/research costs through their purchase of hunting license fees/ equipment. For the record, hunters do so willingly b/c of **American System of Conservation Funding**, a user-pay model celebrating its 85th Anniversary which also underscores the noble story of hunters as America’s original conservationists.

Steve Keithley, Founder (301/785-4774 [sssbkeith@comcast.net])

Bill Miles, Advocate (443/404-7449 [billmilesmd@comcast.net])

PROPOSED AMENDMENT/RATIONALE: Repeal the current statutory exclusion of “fox chasing” from the definition of “hunting” under §10–101 NR. Fox chasing involves the pursuit of wild animals on horseback with trained hounds; thus, meeting the definition of hunting regardless of whether a fox is killed. Wildlife law regulates disturbance and harassment, not just harvest, and Maryland already regulates similar dog-pursuit activities as hunting (§10–413, NR). Including “fox chasing” in the hunting definition makes common sense and it is time to recognize same by State law.



*“**Hunt**” means to pursue, capture, catch, kill, gig, trap, shoot, or attempt to pursue, capture, catch, kill, gig, trap, or shoot, or in any manner reduce any bird or mammal to personal possession.*

SENIORS: Today SEEE will hear a wide array of arguments in support of SB 643. The HUNTERS OF MARYLAND LLC are mindful of these arguments and support them all. Our particular focus will be on the impact of passage from a senior perspective when it comes to Canada goose Sunday hunting...*those aging hunters whose days afield are numbered.*

Roughly one out of every three Maryland hunters is a senior (65+); meaning, Sunday restrictions disproportionately affect older residents more than any other group. For many older hunters, Sunday hunting is not an added opportunity – it is the only practical opportunity. As we age, physical stamina declines, medical appointments sadly increase, and many seniors become dependent upon children or grandchildren for transportation and assistance in the field. Those family members typically work during the week. Sunday is often the only day when a senior can hunt safely with help.

This issue is also about health and well-being. Being afield keeps aging hunters mobile, socially connected and mentally engaged. Goose hunting is not a solitary activity – it is morning exercise, conversation in a blind, and family tradition. When access disappears, isolation increases.

Safety afield improves when seniors are accompanied. Prohibiting Sunday Canada goose hunting can push older hunters to go it alone on weekdays instead of with family support only available on weekends.

Current restrictions unintentionally disadvantage those least able to adapt; that is, seniors and families with rigid work schedules. Those with flexible weekday access are mostly unaffected. In practice, prohibition becomes an access barrier rather than a conservation measure.

From a senior perspective, SB 643 is not about increasing harvest. It is about maintaining safe participation, preserving family traditions, and allowing seniors to remain connected to Maryland's outdoors as long as they are able to do so.

SEASONS ARE SCIENCE-BASED: Wildlife agencies set seasons using federal population modeling and harvest limits. Adding Sunday does not: (1) extend season length; (2) change bag limits; or (3) change federal frameworks. Simply, Sunday hunting only distributes effort and biology controls harvest...calendars do not.



CLOSING STATEMENT

“My days of goose hunting are almost over. No one can join me anymore b/c most of my ‘ole hunting buddies are long gone. It saddens me just thinking about it. The thrill of being out there is not so much about pulling the trigger as it is watching the geese dance. Once you’ve seen it, you’re hooked for life. On behalf of those of us old guys who still yearn to be out there watching the dance, I hope the Hunters of Maryland will be able to overcome any opposition and convince State lawmakers to look out for us.”

Kenneth Lyons