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Chairman Brian Feldman
& The Education, Energy and Environment

I write to you regarding proposed legislation that would remove Maryland's longstanding prohibition on Sunday migratory bird hunting and require the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to allow certain groups to hunt Canada geese on Sundays. I respectfully urge you to consider the broader conservation, biological, and economic implications of this proposal before advancing the bill.

Maryland is unique within the Atlantic Flyway. Our state hosts a disproportionately large share of wintering Atlantic Population (AP) Canada geese and other migratory waterfowl, while also serving as the most heavily hunted wintering area in the Flyway. Maryland ranks fourth nationally in Canada goose harvest, with a ten-year average of 24,440 goose hunters harvesting approximately seven geese per five days afield. Comparisons to surrounding states that allow Sunday waterfowl hunting are not equivalent. Virginia (ranked 20th), Pennsylvania (10th), and Delaware (32nd) experience significantly lower harvest totals and hunting pressure. Maryland's biological and management circumstances are fundamentally different.

The Atlantic Population Canada goose breeding pair numbers have fluctuated significantly in recent years, declining from 167,629 breeding pairs in 2016 to 88,890 in 2024. The long-term maintenance objective is 60,000 breeding pairs. During the period between 2016 and the 2025–2026 hunting season, seasons that expanded to 45 days with a two-bird daily bag were followed by population declines and a return to a more restrictive framework of 30 days and one bird per day. These geese already face pressures from habitat change, weather variability on northern breeding grounds, and other environmental stressors. Additional hunting pressure should not be layered onto a population that has demonstrated volatility.

Maryland's history underscores the risks of overharvest. In the 1990s, sustained high hunting pressure, combined with poor nesting and hatch conditions, led to a complete moratorium on Canada goose hunting from 1995 through 2001. Given recent fluctuations in breeding pair numbers, another restrictive cycle—or even a moratorium—is not beyond possibility. A moratorium would require a minimum three-year closure and would significantly harm Maryland's hunting economy, as well as risk losing a generation of waterfowl hunters.

Proponents suggest that adding Sundays would increase participation and opportunity. However, available data does not support this conclusion. Virginia permitted Sunday hunting beginning in 2014 and experienced a 13 percent decline in hunting license sales from 2014 to 2024 (Virginia DCR). During that same period, Maryland—without Sunday waterfowl hunting—experienced

only an 8 percent decline. Hunter participation appears more closely tied to hunt quality and reliability than to the number of available days. Increased disturbance, particularly the removal of a consistent weekly rest day, may degrade hunt quality by altering feeding and flight behavior of migratory waterfowl. Sundays currently provide a predictable day of reduced disturbance, benefiting both birds and overall hunting conditions.

It is also important to note that the bill, as drafted, removes the general prohibition on Sunday migratory bird hunting altogether. While it directs DNR to allow youth, seniors, and students to hunt Canada geese on Sundays, removing the prohibition would authorize DNR to permit Sunday migratory bird hunting for any hunter and across all species. Paradoxically, if Sunday access is limited only to certain groups for Canada geese, other hunters could lose between four and eight hunting days depending on the season length. Furthermore, the bill applies only to private lands. Hunters who rely exclusively on public lands would automatically lose between four and eight hunting days per goose or duck season. Rather than increasing opportunity, this framework risks redistributing and in some cases reducing opportunity.

It is understandable to expand opportunity for species that are demonstrably overpopulated and causing measurable agricultural damage, such as deer. However, there is no comparable waterfowl overpopulation issue requiring correction. Conservation of the migratory resource—shared across state and international boundaries—must take precedence over incremental increases in hunting access.

Maryland cannot afford to “try it and see.” One year of increased harvest coinciding with poor breeding-ground weather conditions could quickly push the entire Flyway into a restrictive regulatory package. The biological consequences would extend far beyond one season and could take years to correct.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask that you maintain Maryland’s longstanding prohibition on Sunday migratory bird hunting and prioritize conservation stability for Atlantic Population Canada geese and other migratory waterfowl.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and commitment to responsible wildlife management.

Sincerely,
Albie Kimble
Concerned Citizen