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Date: March 10, 2026

## **Senate Bill 643– Natural Resources – Sunday Hunting**

Committee: Education, Energy and Environment

MGPA Position: Support with Amendments

On behalf of the Maryland Grain Producers Association (MGPA), representing Maryland farmers who grow corn, soybeans, wheat, barley, and other grains across the State, we respectfully submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 643 with amendments. Specifically, MGPA requests removal of the provisions authorizing Sunday hunting of migratory game birds.

Maryland’s grain farmers work to balance agricultural productivity with responsible wildlife conservation. Our members experience firsthand the impacts of wildlife populations on crop production, and we strongly support policies grounded in sound science that both protect natural resources and address real on-farm challenges.

MGPA supports the bill’s provisions that increase opportunities to harvest deer. Deer overpopulation continues to cause significant and measurable damage to grain crops across Maryland, including corn, soybeans, and small grains. Crop depredation from deer results in yield losses, replanting costs, and increased management burdens for farmers, particularly in rural and suburban interface areas. Expanding hunting opportunities for deer is a targeted and appropriate wildlife management strategy that addresses an overabundant species while providing meaningful relief to agricultural producers.

### **Requested Amendment: Remove Authorization for Sunday Migratory Bird Hunting**

While MGPA supports increased deer harvest opportunities, we respectfully request an amendment to remove the authorization for Sunday hunting of migratory game birds, including waterfowl.

Many Maryland grain farmers lease their land for hunting and derive significant income from leases for waterfowl hunting, specifically, Canada Geese. The State hosts a disproportionately large share of wintering Atlantic Population Canada geese and other migratory waterfowl and is one of the most heavily hunted wintering areas in the Flyway. High existing hunting pressure, combined with Maryland’s geographic importance to wintering birds, requires a cautious, science-based management approach that prioritizes long-term population stability.

MGPA has serious concerns with authorizing additional, high pressure, hunting days given the breeding pair population was as low as 88,000 in 2024. For context, the target before more restrictions and possibly no hunting sets in is 60,000 pairs. History demonstrates the risks of excessive harvest pressure during periods of population volatility. In the 1990s, sustained 3 bird limits for 90 days coupled with poor weather conditions contributed to a moratorium on Canada goose hunting in Maryland from 1995 to 2001. The loss of lease income for farmers during these already difficult would be extremely detrimental.

From an agricultural perspective, there is no comparable overpopulation problem with migratory waterfowl that justifies additional hunting pressure. Unlike deer, migratory geese and ducks do not cause

widespread, sustained crop depredation that would necessitate expanded harvest opportunities. As such, conservation of the resource should take precedence over hunter preference.

MGPA respectfully supports Senate Bill 643 with amendments. We strongly support expanded opportunities to harvest deer to address ongoing crop damage and agricultural losses. However, we urge the Committee to amend the bill to remove the authorization for Sunday hunting of migratory game birds in order to protect vulnerable migratory waterfowl populations.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued support of Maryland agriculture and natural resources.

Amendment:

(13) ~~(i) [A person may not]~~ ~~SUBJECT TO SUBPARAGRAPH (ii) OF THIS 27 PARAGRAPH, THE DEPARTMENT MAY ALLOW A PERSON TO~~ hunt migratory game birds on Sunday.

~~(ii) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL ALLOW THE FOLLOWING PERSONS TO HUNT MIGRATORY CANADA GEESE (ATLANTIC POPULATION) ON SUNDAYS DURING THE OPEN SEASON:-~~

~~—1. JUNIOR HUNTERS;—~~

~~—2. SENIOR HUNTERS;—~~

~~—3. APPRENTICE HUNTERS; AND~~

~~—4. FULL TIME STUDENTS WHO HOLD A HUNTING LICENSE.~~