



NEW ENGLAND BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS AND ANGLERS

March 3, 2020

To Chairman Bennett and the members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Re: BHA Position on H5610

As the fastest growing organization of hunters and anglers in the nation, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA) seeks to ensure North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting. BHA supports the North American Wildlife Conservation Model, which asserts that wildlife is held in public trust as a scientifically managed natural resource that can be enjoyed by all Americans, and opposes the privatization of wildlife.

Importing members of the deer family for captive hunting in Rhode Island presents a significant risk to our native deer because of the potential introduction of chronic wasting disease, and we support the enactment of laws, policies and regulations that protect to our native wildlife and ecosystem. Additionally, some non-native animals that are popular in the captive hunting industry such as wild pigs are notoriously difficult to contain within captive facilities, and could cause costly, significant and long-lasting damage to Rhode Island's native ecosystem if they were imported and escaped.

While we support the intent of H5610 – to prohibit captive hunting in Rhode Island - we are concerned that as-written this bill would do little to accomplish this goal. **We recommend that the Committee tables this bill and passes H5329**, which has the same intent and sufficiently addresses the concerns outlined below.

Lacks Clear Definition and Full Protection

H5610 proposes a ban on hunting any mammal that is held “in captivity” for “amusement” and “sport”. As it is written the bill lacks a clear definition of captivity, leaving its scope open to interpretation at a later time. We recognize that the intention of the bill is to prohibit captive hunting altogether, and believe that it should define exactly what this practice involves in clear terms to remove or minimize opinion or interpretation. We are also concerned that as-written the bill would not prohibit captive hunting for animals if the hunter chooses to consume meat after the hunt, which is a common and accepted motivation for hunting in North America. The risk of importing diseased wildlife and/or damaging invasive species exists regardless of the captive hunter's motivation, and we believe that captive hunting should be prohibited regardless of intent.

Doesn't Focus on Artificial Propagation of Game

H5610 proposes adding a section to Rhode Island General Law Chapter 20-17, which pertains to “Artificial Propagation of Game”. However, the bill does not fit within this Chapter's scope because it only peripherally mentions breeding of game animals. What it primarily focuses on is methods of take and conduct within captive hunting facilities, and these things would be more appropriately added to Chapter 20-19, which controls the permitting of and requirements for conducting operations on shooting preserves. In the context of this bill shooting preserves would be synonymous with captive hunting facilities.

In conclusion, we recognize that the intent of H5610 is to prohibit captive hunting in Rhode Island to address concerns such as the introduction of chronic wasting disease and invasive species, and we support that intent. However, we do not believe that H5610 would adequately protect Rhode Island's ecosystem from these hazards, and **we recommend the Committee table this bill and vote in support of H5329**, which has the same goal and addresses the concerns raised in this letter.

Sincerely,

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