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Chairman David Bennett
Cc: Representatives Slater, Diaz, and O'Brien
House Committee on Environment & Natural Resources
State House
Providence, RI 02903

February 4, 2024

Re: House Bill 7294- The RI Land Trust Council SUPPORTS the prohibition of captive hunting in RI.

Dear Chairman Bennett & Members of the Committee:

The Rhode Island Land Trust Council (Council) is a coalition of more than 50 land trusts – mostly all-volunteer, community-based organizations that protect and steward Rhode Island's open spaces, farms, forestland, historic sites, and natural areas. The lands that we conserve protect wildlife habitat and drinking water supplies, and provide critical outdoor spaces for public recreation. The Council **supports** this important legislation because it prohibits both captive hunting and the importation of wildlife for that purpose.

As defined in the bill, captive hunting involves hunting animals within fences and other man-made structures. It is common in the captive hunting industry for animals to be bred elsewhere and transported prior to the hunt, often crossing state lines, which is also of concern because imported animals can interact with native wildlife through fencing, or worse, escape into the local environment.

When animals like wild boar are imported and escape there are widespread negative impacts to the environment and economy. Wild boar are highly intelligent and notorious for escaping from their pens. They spread disease and compete with native wildlife, damage complex ecosystems, destroy cropland by rooting and digging, and can have significant impacts on wetlands. They are prolific breeders, and once they have escaped, they are incredibly difficult to control. According to USDA-APHIS, wild boar are the most expensive invasive species in North America, costing the US an estimated \$1.5 billion in damages and control costs each year.

Importing members of the deer family in to Rhode Island for captive hunting also presents a significant risk for the introduction of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) – a highly contagious and lethal disease that affects whitetail deer. CWD has a long incubation period and is difficult to detect, and infected deer do not show signs of illness for several years as they spread CWD throughout the population. Rhode Island currently has no known cases of CWD, but the disease is currently endemic to 30 other US states. Studies have also shown that human movement of animals is one of the largest factors in facilitating the spread of CWD nation-wide.

Rhode Island's land trusts simply do not have the resources to handle the negative management impacts that could result from captive hunting. We respectfully urge you to pass this important bill.

Sincerely,

Kate Sayles, Director