



RHODE ISLAND
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
235 Promenade Street, Room 425
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

May 19, 2026

The Honorable David A. Bennett
Chairman
House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H 8451 An Act Relating to Fish and Wildlife – Deer Hunting

Dear Chairman Bennett,

Thank you for providing the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) the opportunity to comment on H 8451, which would establish a process for the Town of New Shoreham to seek exemptions from state hunting regulations. DEM is opposed to this legislation.

Hunting is a highly regulated practice which relies upon the best available science to make decisions that ensure sustainable wildlife populations. This is why Rhode Island law empowers DEM to make management decisions including the fixing of seasons, bag limits, size limits, possession limits, and method of take. Regulations promulgated using this authority are made based on population modeling using surveys and other data, and are subject to public hearing where feedback on proposed provisions can be shared with DEM.

H 8451 proposes to carve out the Town of New Shoreham by establishing a process specific to that community allowing the Town to petition DEM for exemptions from hunting regulations. It is DEM's understanding that this legislation is in response to concerns about the size of the deer population on Block Island. Earlier this year, DEM met with representatives of the Town and expressed willingness to consider temporary waivers from certain provisions of the hunting regulations if they were proposed as part of a comprehensive plan to address the deer population. We also noted that the Town has instituted significant limitations on hunting activity which have likely contributed to the growing deer population on the island. It is DEM's opinion that loosening these restrictions would lead to a reduction in the deer population.

DEM is deeply concerned by the precedent that enactment of this legislation would set. Providing one community with a special process to seek exemptions from state hunting regulations risks undermining the entire regulatory structure by encouraging other communities

to seek similar legislation. DEM remains willing to work with New Shoreham, and any other community, to address concerns about wildlife management through targeted actions and we believe this is the appropriate way to handle such concerns.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on this legislation and would be pleased to make ourselves available as needed. Please feel free to contact Jason McNamee, Deputy Director for Natural Resources, at jason.mcnamee@dem.ri.gov should you have any additional questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Terrence Gray".

Terrence Gray, P.E.
Director

cc: Members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
The Honorable Tina Spears
Danica Iacoi, Esq., Chief of Staff to the Speaker of the House
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, House Policy Director