



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

February 16, 2024

Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

HB 481

*Natural Resources - Antlerless Deer Hunting Programs - Authorization*

**LETTER OF INFORMATION**

On behalf of our Maryland supporters, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) would like to provide the committee with brief background and information on HB 481, which as currently drafted would authorize a person to receive a raffle ticket for each antlerless deer hunted by the person during a certain raffle program that has as its objective the hunting of antlerless deer. We do not take a position on this bill but want to ensure the committee understands the context of the larger conversation around deer management in Maryland.

The HSUS, along with wildlife management professionals and sportsmen's groups, stands in firm opposition to any legislation that contravenes longstanding conservation principles to create direct payments to hunters for taking what is, has been, and must always be a public resource that is managed in the public trust. Further, the commercialization of Maryland's wildlife runs counter to longstanding principles of responsible, fair chase hunting, as well as the historic rejection of market hunting by wildlife management agencies and professionals.

With regard to the regulated hunting of deer, The Wildlife Society says the following:

Killing contests differ from typical regulated hunting by the very nature of the organized public competition and prizes being given specifically for killing the largest, smallest, or most animals. "Big Buck" pools or organized record books differ from killing contests because the animals recognized in these competitions are harvested consistent with ordinary and generally accepted hunting practices and then introduced to the competition.<sup>1</sup>

As drafted, we do not take a position on this bill. However, it is critical that the committee understands we have deep reservations about this type of raffle program, and we would need to closely review any potential amendments to the bill to determine if they change our position on the legislation. We urge the committee to review all deer hunting legislation with a critical eye for avoiding commodification of this public resource and to look for opportunities to promote other solutions to human/wildlife conflict.

The HSUS urges the Maryland farming community to work with the Department of Natural Resources to expand the implementation of strategic exclusion, repellent techniques and scare tactics for reducing cervid crop damage and build on existing non-lethal damage management approaches. The use of fencing and/or electric fencing systems is cost effective during the growing season and for high value crops. These proven and sustainable damage prevention methods should be included as the cost of doing business irrespective of deer density.

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<sup>1</sup> The Wildlife Society Issue Statement: Wildlife Killing Contests <https://wildlife.org/tws-issue-statement-wildlife-killing-contests/>