



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

February 19, 2025

BILL NUMBER: House Bill 857

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources – Pursuing Wounded Deer After Legal Hunting Hours – Authorization

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Department supports House Bill 857 because it codifies actions that occur on occasion during the regulated deer seasons. Previously, there was no legal or efficient means to dispatch a wounded deer after legal shooting hours unless the hunter contacted Natural Resources Police who would respond and dispatch the animal for the hunter. However, limited Natural Resources Police field staff preclude this from occurring in most instances.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Maryland deer hunters harvest approximately 80,000 deer annually during the September – January deer season. Hunters are allowed to harvest deer from 30 minutes before sunrise until 30 minutes after sunset. Hunters often take deer in the waning minutes of the legal hunting day. Due to the lateness of these encounters, deer are often not recovered until after legal shooting time has expired. Occasionally, a harvested deer may not have expired when the hunter locates it. Ethically, hunters want to dispatch the animal as quickly as possible, but current law technically prohibits hunters from being able to do this if the legal shooting time has passed. It is the experience of the Department that most hunters proceed with dispatching the animal if the location is otherwise safe and the deer is still in an area where the hunter has legal permission to be present.

BILL EXPLANATION

HB 857 authorizes the Department to adopt regulations that would allow deer hunters who hunt a deer during legal shooting hours to dispatch the animal after legal shooting hours and is still alive. Hunters must use the weapon type that is otherwise legal for use during the deer hunting season that is open. The Department anticipates creating a regulatory framework that would require the hunter to call the Department’s 24/7 Communications center and report out their information, location, and activity. This would create an informed and safe contact scenario for law enforcement officers who may be called to the scene.