

**Testimony on HB 2076 relating to Free Disabled Veteran Hunting and Fishing Licenses
To
The House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources**

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HB 2076 seeks to exempt resident disabled veterans from needing hunting and fishing licenses and provides other issuances of the Department free as well. **The Department opposes the provisions contained in the bill.** The provisions of the bill would be effective upon publication in the statute book.

A basic tenant of the conservation model of North America is that the sale of licenses for both hunting and fishing pay the way for conservation of all species of wildlife. The bill proposes to add to the list of exemptions for needing a hunting or fishing license, as well as provides free deer permits, turkey permits and anything else the Department issues for a fee. The Department is a fee funded agency and depends on license and permit sales to maintain the recreation and wildlife management programs it administers. One only need look to the current list of exemptions for sales tax to see a glimpse of the future if we continue down this road.

Subsequently, if a "benefit" is provided to a particular group of individuals, that benefit costs other users in the form of increased fees to make up for the budgetary shortfall that would accompany the benefit. In this case, there is also a corresponding loss of federal funding that accompanies each exempt license purchase.

The Department feels that if the benefit is to veterans for their service to the country, a better alternative is to ensure that the benefit is provided by all citizens of the State and not just those currently using the services. By way of example, there is currently an appropriation of State General Fund to the Department to pay for lost revenue for free hunting and fishing licenses to National Guardsmen and women. **Additionally, there is already an SGF appropriation for resident disabled thirty percent service-connected disabled veterans for hunting and fishing licenses that keeps the Department whole and keeps federal funding in place based on sales of licenses. This arose because of these exact same concerns of the Department in previous years.**

The Department appreciates the support of the Committee in opposing the bill.

House Agriculture & Natural
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