



To: House Municipal and County Government Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 301
107 N Main St.
Concord, NH 03301

Re: HB 1115 – An Act Relative to the Discharge of a Firearm in the Compact Part
of a City or Town.

Position: Oppose

Date: February 14, 2020

Honorable Members of the House Municipal and County Government Committee:

My name is Joseph Mullin and I am the New England States Coordinator for the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF). I respectfully urge you to oppose House Bill 1115 (HB 1115) – legislation that would triple the current firearms discharge distance around nonresidential, commercial buildings - forcibly and unduly closing-off access to hunting and firearms training. Often enacted due to unfounded safety concerns, arbitrary and unnecessarily large discharge distances negatively impact hunter access in suburban and exurban areas. These discharge distances not only impact the ability of the New Hampshire Fish and Game (NHFG) Department to rely on hunters to manage localized overabundant wildlife populations, but also negatively impact hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation, which has a real and substantial impact on the conservation funding that benefits all citizens of the Granite State.

For more than 80 years, sportsmen and women have been the primary funders of state-level conservation efforts in this state and are thus an important constituency that provides benefits for all New Hampshire residents. In 2019 alone, New Hampshire's sportsmen and women generated over \$19 million dollars for conservation through revenue derived from license sales and excise taxes on sporting-related goods in the unique "*user-pays, public-benefits*" structure known as the American System of Conservation Funding (ASCF). The funds collected through this program are the lifeblood of state fish and wildlife agencies (including the NHFG Department) – the primary managers of our nation's fish and wildlife resources. These critical conservation dollars fund a variety of efforts including: enhanced fish and wildlife habitat and populations, recreational access to public and private lands, shooting ranges and boat access facilities, wetlands protection and its associated water filtration and flood retention functions, and improved soil and water conservation – all which benefit the public at large, not just sportsmen and women.

Currently, it is unlawful to discharge a firearm in New Hampshire within 300 feet of nonresidential, commercial building. HB 1115 would triple this distance, setting it back to 900 feet. Under the existing discharge distance laws, the limitation of 300 feet means that there is an overall area of roughly 6.5 acres in which the discharge of a firearm is prohibited. When the distance is extended to 900 feet, the amount of lost space increases nine-fold to 58 acres. Essentially, by tripling this setback to 900 feet, there is a substantial and egregious loss of real estate in which a firearm may be discharged, which severely limits access for sportsmen and women. The issue of access,

or a lack thereof, has a heavy-hand in affecting hunter participation, and a decrease in property as extreme as this cannot be taken lightly. In fact, a lack of access is regularly cited as the number one reason (over which policy makers have any control) that lapsed hunters give when asked why they decided to stop hunting. As such, the overall reduction in access that this bill would create will very likely lead to a further decline in hunter participation, resulting in a reduction in conservation funding for the state, as well as a loss of a valuable management tool to deal with localized issues of overabundant wildlife.

Participation in hunting has been on a declining trend in New Hampshire for the past 30 years. In 1988, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported a total of 97,005 certified paid license holders¹; by 2019, that number had decreased to 57,632². Because the NHFG Department relies heavily on funding generated by the sale of hunting licenses, the decline of hunters in New Hampshire poses a threat to the future ability of the Department to effectively carry out its mission. At a time when participation in hunting has been on a declining trend in the Granite State (and on a national level), we encourage the legislature to explore ways in which to incentivize further participation, and actively oppose efforts that have been empirically proven to restrict participation and undermine the conservation funding of the NHFG Department.

For the reasons stated above, I respectfully urge the members of the House Municipal and County Government Committee to oppose HB 1115. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this issue. Should you require any additional information on this, or any other sportsmen-related topic, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,



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¹ *National Hunting License Report*. US Fish and Wildlife Service, 2015. Available online at: <https://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/LicenseInfo/HuntingLicCertHistory.pdf>.

² *National Hunting License Data*. US Fish and Wildlife Service, 2018. Available online at: <https://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/LicenseInfo/Nat%20Hunting%20License%20Report%202019.pdf>.