



To: **Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife**
Cross Building, Room 206
100 State House
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: **LD 626**
LD 1166
LD 1241

Position: **Support**

Date: **April 12, 2023**

Honorable Members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife:

My name is Joseph Mullin, and I am the Northeastern States Manager for the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF). I respectfully urge you to support LD 626, LD 1166, and LD 1241— three bills that would lessen the present restrictions on Sunday hunting in Maine. Prohibitions on Sunday hunting serve as a hurdle for existing sportsmen and women and as a barrier to entry for those who are interested in trying hunting. These limitations also curb potential economic benefits that the state would otherwise be earning. Nothing in these bills would eliminate private property rights or force individual property owners to allow access to their lands on Sundays. Contrarily, LD 626 and LD 1166 would expand property rights by allowing landowners the opportunity to hunt their own properties on Sundays should they wish to do so. With these considerations in mind, I urge the Committee to seek ways to increase access and opportunity for sportsmen and women by lessening the restrictions on Sunday hunting.

Founded in 1989, CSF is the informed authority across outdoor issues and serves as the primary conduit for influencing public policy. Working with the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC), the Governors Sportsmen's Caucus (GSC), and the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC), CSF gives a voice to hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and trappers on Capitol Hill and throughout state capitols advocating on vital outdoor issues that are the backbone of our nation's conservation legacy.

Access is a major limiting factor hindering participation in hunting, and restrictions on Sunday hunting provide a temporal-access barrier to youth and others that work or attend school throughout the week and are often involved in extra-curricular activities on Saturdays. The hunting conservation community strongly supports measures that increase access and opportunity for sportsmen and women, and I encourage you to vote in favor of LD 626, LD 1166, and LD 1241. Through the guidance and leadership of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, these bills would significantly improve access and opportunity for hunters and would likely result in increased hunting participation. 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, and these bills pose

to take a step in the right direction.¹ As such, the overall increase in access that these bills would create has the potential to boost hunter participation – something that has been on a generally declining trend in Maine for the past 30 years. Because the MDIFW relies heavily on funding generated by the sale of hunting licenses, the decline of hunters in Maine poses a threat to the future ability of the Department to effectively carry out its mission. Although this trend has been present for the past few decades, states across the nation – Maine included – saw increases in hunter participation as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.² Sportsmen and women took to their favorite woods, fields, and waterbodies in the pursuit of game. Maine reportedly saw a 9% increase, reflecting a growth in the number of hunters heading afield in the Pine Tree State.³ Unfortunately, a recent report from the Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports discovered that 2022 hunting license sales had fallen to pre-pandemic levels, decreasing by 3.1% compared to what was seen in 2021.⁴ With the recent increased interest in hunting during the pandemic, these bills serve as an opportunity to curb this generally declining trend.

Sportsmen and women are the primary funders of state-level conservation efforts and are thus an important constituency that provides benefits for all residents of Maine. In 2021 alone, Maine’s sportsmen and women generated more than \$25 million dollars for conservation through revenue derived from license sales and excise taxes on sporting-related goods through the 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 MDIFW) – the primary managers of our nation’s fish and wildlife resources. These critical conservation dollars fund a variety of efforts, such as: 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.

Allowing Sunday hunting would also significantly benefit Maine’s economy, particularly in rural areas, by increasing economic output and job creation. An additional day to hunt would mean more dollars spent by hunters in restaurants, hotels, gas stations and stores throughout the state. Maine’s sportsmen and women are a significant economic force – spending more than \$609 million, supporting more than 10,387 jobs, and generating \$71 million in state and local taxes.⁵ Increasing opportunities on Sundays will allow private landowners, farmers, and others to diversify their income sources by allowing an additional day of hunting on their land, thereby helping to provide a capital influx into the more rural economies. Throughout this debate, there has been much talk about the economic benefits of Sunday hunting to the general economy, but one area that has not been covered in detail is the potential for private property owners to lease their land specifically for hunting. Allowing farmers and other landowners to diversify their income sources by allowing an additional day of hunting on their land will help to provide a large capital influx to rural economies that are hardest hit by the recent pandemic. Creating additional opportunities will also encourage out-of-state hunting-related tourism and further bolster rural economies throughout the state.

The desire to remove Sunday hunting restrictions has been a growing theme across the nation, and I encourage the Committee to consider lifting this dated “blue law” for the benefit of the entire state. The vast majority of states with current or previous restrictions on Sunday hunting – including several within the northeast region – have been actively working to lessen or eliminate said prohibitions over the past decade. These states include Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia – all of whom have made significant positive changes to their Sunday hunting laws or (in the case of West Virginia) have eliminated all restrictions on hunting on Sundays. In all instances where restrictions have been lessened or eliminated states have

¹ Duda, M. D., Jones, M. F., & Criscione, A. (2010). Page 207. *The Sportsman’s Voice: Hunting and Fishing in America*. State College: Venture Publishing Inc. ISBN-10: 1-892132-90-7.

² *Hunting pastime spikes during pandemic. Conservationists are glad. Here’s why.* The Washington Post, 2021. Available online at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/hunting-pastime-spikes-during-pandemic-conservationists-are-glad-heres-why/2021/01/08/d0342dfa-3e5c-11eb-8bc0-ae155bee4aff_story.html.

³ IBID.

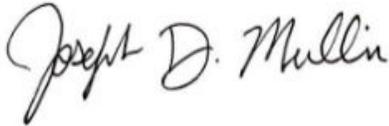
⁴ *Hunting License Sales 2021-2022.* Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports, 2023. Available online at: <https://cahss.org/our-research/hunting-license-sales-2021-2022/>.

⁵ Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation, *supra*.

not seen an increase in enforcement concerns or conflicts between user groups and there have not been any reported negative impacts on wildlife populations. Letters from several state fish and wildlife agencies detailing their positive experiences following these policy changes are attached for your consideration.

For the reasons stated above, I respectfully encourage you to support LD 626, LD 1166, and LD 1241. 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,



Joseph Mullin
Northeastern States Manager | Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
110 North Carolina Ave., SE | Washington, DC 20003
Jmullin@congressionalsportsmen.org | 202-253-6883

Enclosed: Letter from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection detailing its experiences following the passage of legislation to authorize Sunday hunting for deer on private lands.

Letter from the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife detailing their experiences following the passage of legislation to authorize deer hunting for five Sundays on private and public lands designated by government agencies.

Letter from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries following the passage of legislation to authorize Sunday hunting on private lands throughout the state and on public waters for waterfowl.



May 16, 2016

Brent Miller
Northeast States Director
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
110 North Carolina Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Mr. Miller:

In 2015, the Connecticut General Assembly adopted Public Act 15-204, An Act Authorizing Bow and Arrow Hunting on Certain Private Property on Sundays. By adoption, the array of legal forms of hunting was expanded to include archery hunting for white tailed deer on private lands in zone determined by the commissioner to be overpopulated, the taking of propagated birds on licensed private shooting preserves with the consent of the town in which the preserve is located, and takings in conjunction with regulated trapping.

Although limited in scope, authorizing archery deer hunting on private lands represents a significant expansion of hunting privileges in Connecticut. Whitetailed deer hunting is the most intensely pursued form of hunting with similar numbers of sportsmen engaged in archery as firearms deer hunting.

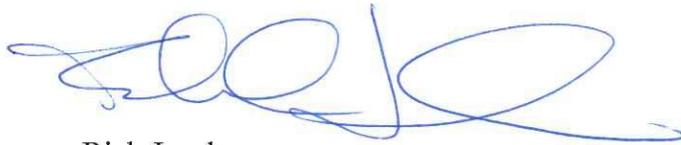
In 2011 we conducted a survey of licensed archers in an area of the state with particularly high deer densities. In that survey, hunters identified hunting on Sunday as one of the changes they believed would increase opportunity the most. In fact, ninety four percent of archers indicated they would hunt on Sundays if given the chance.

Since adoption of PA 15-204, we have enjoyed one season of expanded deer hunting. We did not change season lengths, bag limits, or any other rules relative to the taking of deer. We have continued to collect hunter activity and harvest data and the results are much as we anticipated. Although Saturday remained the most popular weekend-day for hunting activity during the fall archery season (September through December), effort was slightly higher on Sunday during the January season. Overall, harvest on weekends (Saturday and Sunday combined) was higher than, but not substantially different from, previous years when hunters only had access on Saturday. In short, harvest didn't increase substantially. Rather it spread out over the two days available.

As of this date there have been no reported shooting related injuries nor loss of property associated with archery deer hunting on private lands on Sunday, nor have we received substantial negative reaction from the non-hunting public. Rather, of the few negative comments received, the majority have come from hunters expressing angst that the two of the thirteen deer management zones that were not opened to Sunday archery deer hunting and should have been. NOTE: Those zones were determined to be at or near the target deer densities for the management zone.

In summary, adoption of Public Act 15-204, An Act Authorizing Bow and Arrow Hunting on Certain Private Property on Sundays has been an unqualified success. It has bolstered our ability to manage deer populations and created added opportunities for Connecticut sportsmen.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rick Jacobson', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Rick Jacobson,
Director – Wildlife Division



STATE OF DELAWARE
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES &
ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL
DIVISION OF FISH & WILDLIFE
89 Kings Highway
Dover, DE 19901

**OFFICE OF THE
DIRECTOR**

**Phone: (302) 739-9910
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March 8, 2017

Alana M. Barricks
Mid-Atlantic States Coordinator
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
110 North Carolina Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Ms. Barricks:

The State of Delaware enacted legislation in 2016 authorizing deer hunting on five prescribed Sundays during established deer seasons on private lands and on those public lands so designated by government agencies. The Division of Fish & Wildlife worked closely with the Delaware Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus that initiated the legislation.

The Division coordinated with our wildlife advisory council and engaged the public to help determine which public wildlife areas would be open to Sunday deer hunting in consideration of balancing multiple uses of these areas. Approximately 80% of our public wildlife area acreage was open to Sunday deer hunting during the 2016/2017 hunting season, with no reported notable user conflicts on these public lands (or on private lands).

Sunday deer hunting provided additional hunting opportunities and another tool to sustainably manage Delaware's robust deer population. Statewide, 1,170 harvested deer were reported on the five Sundays, helping achieve a record reported deer harvest of 14,742 deer during the 2016/2017 hunting season.

Delaware's inaugural Sunday deer hunting was successful and we look forward to continuing to provide this value-added hunting opportunity for Delaware's hunters.

Sincerely,

David E. Saveikis
Director

*We Bring You Delaware's Great Outdoors
through Science and Service*



Molly J. Ward
Secretary of Natural Resources

COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

Bob Duncan
Executive Director

April 15, 2016

Bee Frederick
Southeastern States Manager
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
624 S. Perry Street
Montgomery, AL 36104

Dear Mr. Frederick:

As you are aware, in 2014 the Virginia General Assembly passed Senate Bill 154 and House Bill 1237, which permitted Sunday hunting under certain circumstances. With a few exceptions, Sunday hunting is now permitted for waterfowl and is also allowed for other species by private landowners, their families, or anyone with written permission from the landowner. Hunting of deer or bear with dogs while using a weapon is not permitted on Sundays, and certain limitations pertaining to areas near places of worship and other restrictions were also included in the legislation.

You have inquired as to the results of the implementation of the new Sunday hunting allowances in Virginia, as we have now had it in place for nearly two years. I can report to you that hunting on Sundays has gone well statewide. The Department elected to largely leave hunting seasons in place as they existed previously, and simply allow Sunday hunting as directed by the legislation. Bag limits were likewise left in place as they existed before.

Sunday hunting has not had a detrimental impact upon our deer herd. So far, average deer harvests for Sundays more closely approximate the averages for weekdays, and are far less than Saturdays (approximately 50% of the average Saturday during both archery and muzzleloader seasons, and roughly 20% of the average Saturday during general firearms season). While some had feared that the addition of another day of hunting to the week could lead to an unacceptably high deer harvest, that has not been our experience. Turkey harvests on Sundays have also closely approximated weekday averages.

Another concern of some related to Sunday hunting had been whether it might pose an undue burden upon our law enforcement officers. Again, to date, those fears have not been realized. Similar to harvest statistics, the number of hunting-related calls to our law enforcement dispatch on Sunday's number similarly to the average weekday, increasing only a modest

Bee Frederick
Southeastern States Manager
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
April 15, 2016
Page 2

amount over the number of calls that were received on Sundays before hunting was allowed. Hunting-related arrests trend similarly.

In sum, I can say that Virginia's experience so far with Sunday hunting is that of additional opportunities for sportsmen and women in the field without unacceptable impacts upon our wildlife resources, notable increases in citizen complaints, or other serious law enforcement concerns. We look forward to the coming seasons and to our hunters continuing to have this additional day available to them.

Sincerely,



Robert W. Duncan
Executive Director

RWD/RJB