

To: New York State Legislature
State Street and Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12224

Re: Fiscal Year 2023-2024 New York State Budget, Part RR –
Make the Youth Deer Hunting Program Permanent

Position: Support

Date: March 29, 2023

Honorable Members of the New York State Legislature:

We, the undersigned organizations which represent tens of thousands of sportsmen and women across the state, write to you today in strong support of Part RR of the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 New York State Budget. This section, titled “Make the Youth Deer Hunting Program Permanent,” builds off of a precedent set by the 2021 budget that expanded opportunities for junior hunters and would permanently authorize 12 and 13-year-old hunters to pursue deer with a firearm or crossbow when supervised by an experienced adult hunter. This provision was agreed to as part of the 2021-2022 budget negotiations and has been included in the Executive budget proposal. The Assembly has offered a provision to extend the Pilot Program, but the Senate has not included any provisions to make the successful program permanent. We, as a sportsmen and women community, support any initiative to increase youth participation in hunting and outdoor recreation. Along with being one of America’s most time-honored traditions, hunting is not only one of the safest recreational activities but is a great way for people of all ages to spend increased time outdoors. Expanding hunting opportunities, like this and others, for youth will ensure the next generation of New Yorkers will be able to enjoy the outdoors and continue to support conservation funding around the state. **As such, we are writing to encourage your support for Part RR – Make the Youth Deer Hunting Program Permanent in the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 New York State Budget.**

Beginning during the 2021-22 hunting season, a Pilot Program was implemented in New York, allowing counties to opt in to authorize mentored deer hunting for 12 and 13-year-olds. The overwhelming acceptance of this program and opt in by all but two eligible counties illustrates the support for the program. If made permanent, this provision brings New York’s hunting age in line with most other states in the country. For two years in a row, this Pilot Program exemplified the safety of youth hunters, as the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) stated in its “Deer Hunting by 12- and 13- Year-Old Hunters” report to the New York State Senate and Assembly, “The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation’s (DEC) review of hunting-related shooting incidents (HRSIs) found that youth hunters are the safest group of hunters; the first year of the pilot continued that tradition with zero HRSIs.”¹ Essentially, following the 2022-23 hunting season in the Empire State, the DEC reviewed the facts and figures for the Pilot Program’s overall success, and the results were clear, “The second year of the pilot has proven to be as successful, safe, and popular as the first.”²

¹ “Deer Hunting by 12- and 13- Year-Old Hunters.” Page 1. New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Available online at: https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/jrhunterlegislative report22.pdf.

² IBID.

Not only did this program prove the high standard of safety maintained through youth mentored hunts for this age group, but it also exemplified the strong rate of success in harvesting deer and further proving that hunting is a preferred wildlife management tool. Based on the same DEC report to the New York State Senate and Assembly, the total number of Deer Harvest Reports submitted to the DEC by 12 and 13-year-old hunters increased by over 14%, going from 1,564 during the 2021-22 season to 1,824 during the 2022-23 season.³ The success of this program has the absolute ability to create lifelong hunters, as evidenced by the DEC's statement that "In 2022, 82% of these young hunters and 87% of their adult mentors reported being moderately or greatly satisfied with their youth big game hunting experience."⁴

As the state continues to identify ways to increase youth participation in outdoor recreation, expanding hunting opportunities for all species will go a long way towards achieving this goal. As hunting is one of the largest contributors of conservation funding for the state, it is imperative that young New Yorkers have both the opportunity and training to participate in big game, small game, and bird hunting. Making this program permanent will be an important step in this endeavor.

The DEC concluded its report by recommending that the New York State Senate and Assembly "Make permanent the authorization for 12- and 13-year-old hunters to hunt deer with a firearm and crossbow,"⁵ and it is in recognition of the many positive bearings mentioned above that **we encourage you to support Part RR – Make the Youth Deer Hunting Program Permanent in the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 New York State Budget.** Thank you for considering our comments on this issue. Should you require additional information on this, or other sportsmen-related topics, please feel free to contact us at any time.

Sincerely,

American Woodcock Society
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Ducks Unlimited
National Deer Association
National Wild Turkey Federation – New York Chapter
New York 4-H Shooting Sports
New York Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
New York Crossbow Coalition
New York Houndsmen Conservation Association
New York State Conservation Council
New York State Conservation Fund Advisory Board
New York State Council of Trout Unlimited
New York State Fish and Wildlife Management Board
New York State Trappers Association
Ruffed Grouse Society
Safari Club International – New York Chapters

³ IBID at Page 2.

⁴ IBID at Page 4.

⁵ IBID.