



To: **Hon. Debra Heffernan**
Chair
House Natural Resources & Energy Committee
House Majority Hearing Room (H217)
411 Legislative Avenue
Dover, DE 19901

Hon. Sophie Phillips
Vice Chair
House Natural Resources & Energy Committee
House Majority Hearing Room (H217)
411 Legislative Avenue
Dover, DE 19901

Re: **House Bill 271 – Removal of Prohibition on Sunday Game Bird Hunting**

Position: **Support**

Date: **1/23/2024**

Honorable Chairperson Heffernan, Vice Chair Phillips, and members of the House Natural Resources & Energy Committee,

My name is Kaleigh Leager, and I am the Senior Coordinator, Mid-Atlantic States for the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF). I respectfully urge you to vote favorably on Delaware House Bill 271 (HB 271). With the passage of this legislation, the outdated prohibition on Sunday game bird hunting will be lifted, allowing the subject matter experts, the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), to make science-based wildlife management decisions, which includes the setting of hunting season dates.

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.

HB 271 makes a simple amendment to the current statute (Section 1. Amend § 712, Title 7 of the Delaware Code) by striking “game birds” from the language relating to types of game prohibited from being hunted on Sundays. In 2016, the [Delaware Legislative Sportsmen’s Caucus](#) spearheaded the passage of [HB 289](#) which permitted deer hunting on both private and public lands (subject to approval of the appropriate regulatory body) on five Sundays during firearms seasons. In 2018, the state of Delaware took things further by passing SB 198 which allowed hunting every Sunday throughout the state’s archery and deer season. Game bird hunters (including waterfowl and turkey hunters) should have the same hunting opportunities as deer hunters, as both groups experience the same type of scheduling conflicts and limitations.

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. Now more than ever, individuals and families need the ability to participate in safe and healthy recreation that provides citizens the chance to harvest fresh and healthy meat for consumption and nourishment. The hunting conservation community strongly supports measures that increase access and opportunity for sportsmen and women. While HB 271 does not establish a 7-day/week hunting season, it lifts the current standing prohibition on Sunday game bird hunting and will allow DNREC to implement such a season if they believe it is scientifically supported.

In addition, this legislation would significantly improve access and opportunity for Delaware’s bird hunters and will likely result in increased hunting participation. A lack of access is regularly cited as the number one reason that lapsed hunters give when asked why they decided to stop hunting, the passage of HB 271 is a step in the right direction to remedying such barriers and retaining Delaware’s licensed sportsmen and women. Repealing laws prohibiting hunting on Sundays will increase participation and likely license sales by extension, have a positive impact on the state’s economy, and will strengthen the First State’s outdoor heritage. In addition, this will provide more opportunities for friends and families to spend time afield, resulting in the strengthening of relationships, creating bonds and memories, as well as passing down traditions to the next generations. For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on DE HB 271.

Sincerely,



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Enclosed: Relevant issue brief on the following related topic that the bill before you addresses.

[Sunday Hunting Restrictions](#)

Sunday Hunting Restrictions

Introduction

Sunday hunting bans are one of the last remaining examples of the puritanical blue laws that were initially designed to encourage church attendance.¹ At the time when these restrictions were first put in place, other activities that were illegal on a Sunday included opening a store for business, drinking alcoholic beverages, and tilling your fields.² Today, most of the blue laws have been repealed; however, Sunday hunting restrictions of varying degrees remain in 10 states.³ Two states (ME and MA) either severely restrict or completely ban Sunday hunting.⁴ Maryland, for example, allows Sunday hunting in select counties, but restrictions remain for much of the state.⁵

Immense progress was made in West Virginia and North Carolina in 2017, lifting many of the prior bans and restrictions on Sunday hunting. West Virginia passed SB 345 which allows for Sunday hunting on private land statewide.⁶ Before this legislation, hunting was only permitted on Sundays in select counties. In North Carolina, [HB 640](#) (The Outdoor Heritage Act) was passed in 2015 and allowed hunters to use firearms throughout most of the day in most counties.⁷ In 2017, North Carolina further expanded Sunday hunting allowances including transferring regulatory authority for public lands Sunday hunting to the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.⁸ In 2018, West Virginia repealed the prohibition against Sunday hunting on public lands.⁹ These are steps in the right direction for lifting the unnecessary and antiquated bans on Sunday hunting throughout the country.

Points of Interest

- In March 2014, Governor Terry McAuliffe signed Virginia [House Bill 1237](#) which amended the Code of Virginia relating to hunting wild animals and wild birds on private property and state waters on Sundays.¹⁰ The amendment broadly allows for hunting on Sundays with some exceptions, most relating to the proximity of a place of worship.¹¹ Before the passage of this legislation, an economic analysis conducted by the National Shooting Sports Foundation found that providing a Sunday hunting option in Virginia

¹ “Restrictions on Sunday Hunting,” *NSSF*, accessed June 21, 2022.

<https://www3.nssf.org/share/factsheets/PDF/SundayHunting.pdf>

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ “Sunday Hunting Regulations,” *Multi-Organization Coalition to Remove Bans and Restrictions on Sunday Hunting*, accessed June 21, 2022. <http://sundayhunting.org/>.

⁵ “Restrictions on Sunday Hunting,” *NSSF*, accessed June 21, 2022.

<https://www3.nssf.org/share/factsheets/PDF/SundayHunting.pdf>

⁶ “West Virginia Senate Bill 345,” *West Virginia Legislature*, accessed June 21, 2022.

http://www.legis.state.wv.us/Bill_Status/bills_history.cfm?INPUT=345&year=2017&sessiontype=RS.

⁷ “North Carolina General Assembly - House Bill 640 (2015-2016),” *NCGA*, accessed June 21, 2022.

<http://www.ncleg.net/gascripts/BillLookup/BillLookup.pl?Session=2015&BillID=h640>.

⁸ “NC H559 | 2017-2018 | Regular Session,” June 30, 2017, *LegiScan*, accessed June 21, 2022.

<https://legiscan.com/NC/bill/H559/2017>.

⁹ <https://legiscan.com/WV/bill/SB451/2019>

¹⁰ “Virginia House Bill 1237 (2014),” *Virginia’s Legislative Information System*, accessed June 21, 2022.

<https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?141+sum+HB1237>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

would directly contribute an additional \$296 million to the state's economy and 3,927 new jobs would be created.¹²

- In New York, Sunday hunting was opened in 1996 for three Sundays during the gun season. Five years later, however, the entire state allowed Sunday hunting throughout the year, with few exceptions.
- In Ohio, a three-year trial period for Sunday hunting was initiated in 1998, and then became permanent in 2002.¹³
- Before 2003, Sunday hunting in Michigan was banned on private land in certain counties, but in 2003, all Sunday hunting closures were repealed.¹⁴
- Those opposed to Sunday hunting have claimed that allowing Sunday hunting would harm game populations and pose safety issues; however, none of the states that recently allowed Sunday hunting have seen these claims substantiated.
- Sunday hunting is seen as a key component of providing the citizenry, particularly the youth, with more opportunities to engage in the sport, which will ultimately lead to more hunters in the years to come.
- A 2011 empirical study conducted by CSF staff found that if Sunday hunting restrictions were lessened in the six states that had the most severe restrictions at that time (CT, DE, ME, MA, PA, VA), an additional 117,500 hunters would likely be recruited or retained by 2016.¹⁵ This would have resulted in substantial increases in funding for the fish and wildlife agencies within these states.
- In 2015, Connecticut passed [HB 6034](#) which allows for archery hunting for deer on Sundays, with some restrictions.¹⁶
- In 2016, the [Delaware Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus](#) spearheaded the passage of [HB 289](#) which permits deer hunting on both private and public lands (subject to approval of the appropriate regulatory body) on five Sundays during firearms seasons.¹⁷
- In 2017, Maryland signed several bills into law that expanded opportunities to hunt both deer and turkey in specific counties.¹⁸
- In 2018, the state of Delaware took things further bypassing S 198 which opened up hunting every Sunday throughout the state's archery and deer season.
- As of 2023, almost 700,000 acres of public land is now being opened to Sunday hunting in South Carolina.
- In 2020, the [Pennsylvania Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus](#) spearheaded the passage of [S 147](#) which was signed into law by [Governors Sportsmen's Caucus](#) Co-Chair (at the time)

¹² "Restrictions on Sunday Hunting," *NSSF*, accessed June 21, 2022.

http://sundayhunting.org/PDF/SundayHunting_EconomicImpact.pdf

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Miller, Brent, "An evaluation of the potential for Sunday hunting repeals to generate increased funding for state wildlife management agencies," May 2011.

¹⁶ "CT HB 6034 | 2015 | General Assembly," July 02, 2015, *LegiScan*, accessed June 21, 2021.

<https://legiscan.com/CT/bill/HB06034/2015>.

¹⁷ "DE HB 289 | 2015-2016 | 148th General Assembly," June 07, 2016, *LegiScan*, accessed June 21, 2022.

<https://legiscan.com/DE/bill/HB289/2015>.

¹⁸ "Sunday Deer Hunting | Maryland Hunting & Trapping Seasons & Regulations – 2016," *eRegulations*, accessed June 21, 2022. <http://www.eregulations.com/maryland/hunting/sunday-deer-hunting/>.

Governor Tom Wolf.¹⁹ The law authorizes one day of deer hunting on Sundays during the archery season, one day of deer hunting during the firearm season, and one day left to the discretion of the Pennsylvania Game Commission for species and season determined by them, which through rulemaking was selected to be bear hunting during the bear firearms season.²⁰

- In 2021, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission approved rules opening Sunday hunting on 55 Game Lands.²¹
- In 2022, Virginia Governor Youngkin signed Senate Bill 8 into law to allow Sunday hunting on public lands in the Commonwealth.²²

Moving Forward

Educational campaigns that highlight the economic, social, and ecological benefits of Sunday hunting are a useful outreach tool and are likely to be successful in garnering further support for Sunday hunting. States should decide for themselves which approach will be most successful for their particular constituencies and localized political climates. State policymakers are encouraged to work with their state wildlife agency and hunting conservation organizations to ensure laws are drafted with all pertinent factors considered (e.g. federal regulations for migratory birds). Repealing blue laws prohibiting hunting on Sundays will increase license sales, have a positive impact on the state's economy, and will increase the private property rights of landowners.

¹⁹ "PA S 147 | 2019-2020 | General Assembly," accessed June 21, 2022.

<https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billInfo/billInfo.cfm?sYear=2019&sInd=0&body=S&type=B&bn=147>

²⁰ "Pennsylvania: Final Sunday Hunting Dates for 2020 Set," published April 13, 2020, by Brent Miller. <http://congressionalsportsmen.org/the-media-room/news/pennsylvania-final-sunday-hunting-dates-for-2020-set>.

²¹ "Sunday Hunting on Game Lands Background," *North Carolina Wildlife*, accessed June 21, 2022. <https://www.ncwildlife.org/Hunting/Where-to-Hunt/Public-Opinion-Survey>.

²² "SB 8: Hunting on Sundays," *Virginia Legislative Information System*, accessed October 6, 2022. <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?ses=221&typ=bil&val=sb8>