

To: Members of the Senate and House Committees on Energy and Natural Resources

From: Luke Houghton, Sportsmen's Alliance

Re: Testimony on House Bill 518 / Senate Bill 257

Dear Mr. Chairman, and members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 257, legislation which makes changes to Ohio's hunting and fishing license structure along with several other items intended to provide better customer service to hunters, anglers and trappers. I represent the Sportsmen's Alliance and a coalition of the top sportsmen and conservation organizations across Ohio including Buckeye Firearms Association, Ducks Unlimited, League of Ohio Sportsmen, Ohio Conservation Federation, Ohio State Trappers Association, Pheasants Forever, Safari Club International – Central Ohio Chapter, Greene County Fish and Game Association, Stark County Federation of Conservation Clubs and Columbiana County Federation of Conservation Clubs.

These organizations, and the members, clubs and chapters we represent, are happy to be proponents of this legislation. By my count, the bill makes roughly ten different changes to hunting and fishing licenses and rules. We support five of them, and believe they will foster more recruitment of new participants, and more convenience for those buying a license. While we have no position on the remaining five items in the bill, we believe they are interesting ideas, and look forward to seeing how they work in the coming years.

The meat of this bill is the creation of multi-year and combination licenses. This is a tool used by many other states, and one that Ohio should be able to offer as well. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to work with ODNR, the Division of Wildlife, the bill sponsors, committee chairmen, and the members of these committees to fashion a multi-year system that provides new products for customers and the best opportunity to increase participation and potential

revenue for the agency. The multi-year fund created in this legislation is well constructed to protect future years license funds, which is a top priority for sportsmen and women in Ohio.

The other items we support include the addition of gas powered ATV/UTV for the disabled, the removal of the 3-year cap on apprentice hunting, the creation of the apprentice fur taker permit, and the addition of the 4% writing fee.

The creation of the Lake Erie non-resident permit, treating non-resident youths the same as resident youths, extending turkey permits for the entire license year in which they were purchased, and changing fishing licenses to be good for a year from the date of purchase are all interesting ideas on which we are taking no position, but very much look forward to seeing how they perform.

This legislation allows the Ohio Division of Wildlife to offer new products to its customers, while protecting its existing revenues, which is an essential component for our organizations for two reasons. First, because resident licenses are the same price now as in 2004, while the cost of health care and retirement for the agency has risen exponentially. But there is a second reason that is out of the control of the legislature.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) is the trade association for the firearms and ammunition industries. At its annual trade show, known as the SHOT Show, the organization revealed that gun sales are down 28% from 2016. Many committee members may recall hearing or reading that gun sales have been at peak levels between 2010 – 2016. This news is relevant because of the excise taxes I referenced earlier in my testimony. Those excise taxes are based on the sale of firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment. The US Fish and Wildlife Service distributes these funds to the states based on a license sales formula. In 2016, ODNR received \$22 million from this funding source. A corresponding decline based on falling firearm sales could produce a \$6 million decline in these revenues to Ohio.

These issues are relevant to Governor Kasich's announced formation of the Jesse Owens State Park and Wildlife Area, which marks the beginning of the state's effort to retain the public grounds known as the AEP ReCreation lands, which are 60,000 acres of hunting, fishing, trapping and camping groups available to all Ohioans. Three years ago, AEP announced its plan to divest these holdings. If not

retained, they represent 10% of all available public hunting and fishing access in Ohio. Retention of these lands are a major priority for sportsmen and women in Ohio, and we want to work with the General Assembly, the Administration, and ODNR on this project.

The bill before you represents hundreds of hours of work and cooperation between members of the House and Senate, staff at ODNR and its Division of Wildlife, and members of Ohio's sportsmen's community. We thank you for the chance to work with you and for your time here this morning. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.