

House Game & Fisheries Committee

Public Hearing – HB 231

May 12, 2015

Pennsylvania Game Commission
R. Matthew Hough, Executive Director

Thank you Chairman Gillespie, Chairman Harhai, and members of the House Game & Fisheries Committee. I appreciate the invitation to testify before you today with regards to House Bill 231 which was introduced by Representative Mullery. With me today are Dorothy Derr and Paul Mahon. Dot is the Director of the agency's Bureau of Administration and Paul is the agency's Director of Automated Technology and are the agency's experts in automated license sales.

I would like to state upfront and for the record that the PA Game Commission is in support of this much anticipated and long overdue legislation.

Nearly six years ago, in conjunction with the Fish and Boat Commission and an outside vendor, the Pennsylvania Automated License System, or PALS was launched. This system finally allowed the hunters of Pennsylvania the opportunity to purchase their hunting and furtaking licenses and add-on privileges or permits faster, easier, and more convenient than in the past. That is, "almost" all of the add-on permits. As you are well aware and the reason for us being here today, applications for antlerless licenses must be submitted through the County Treasurers.

With all of today's technological advantages at our fingertips, to say that the process hunters have to go through to purchase their doe licenses is antiquated would be an understatement. This process remains a point of contention that we hear about every year as I'm sure you do as well. Have you ever sealed that outer part of pink, antlerless application envelope and forgotten whether or not you put the postage stamp on the inside? How many times do you check, recheck, and then check again to make sure everything is filled out exactly the way it needs to be? And if you make a mistake like forgetting to circle the number of applications contained in the envelope, you find out several weeks later that your application was rejected and returned to you through the postal system.

The fact of the matter is that after all of these years, the current antlerless license system is still confusing to many hunters, with no reason other than this is the way it has always been done and hunters are growing tired of this cumbersome process.

Make no mistake about it, Pennsylvania hunters want this process to change. They want to be able to purchase their doe tags (if available) online or over the counter when they visit one of our issuing agents and purchase every other tag and permit. By moving the sale of antlerless licenses to the automated system used by 750 issuing agents, you will be creating that "one-stop-shopping experience" that hunters have been asking for.

This also eliminates the extended waiting game: waiting to find out if you were awarded a doe tag or not; waiting for your check to be processed; and waiting for that doe tag to arrive in the mail. By moving to PALS, you will know if there are antlerless tags available for purchase in the Wildlife

Management Unit (WMU) that you are interested in hunting. And if that WMU is sold out, you will know it immediately and receive an antlerless license for your second choice.

The idea of having a first come, first served system is of great importance to our hunters. Some may argue that the current system with the County Treasurers is first come, first served. In actuality, that is simply not the case, and I would argue that the proposed automated system would in fact be much closer to a true first come, first served system. Unfortunately for a number of hunters over the past few years who have sent in their antlerless applications to a County Treasurer only to find out later that that particular Treasurer's office decided that they would not process any applications, and without giving any kind of notice beforehand. This left many hunters without the opportunity to apply for the WMU they wanted to hunt because by the time they realized what had happened, that WMU was already sold out.

There have been some that have questioned whether or not the automated system can handle the volume of sales that will probably occur on the first day antlerless licenses go on sale. With today's technology, we have no reason to believe it couldn't. Software will be activated that will essentially throttle the transactions, much like the system used today for the sale of concert tickets. This software will put the applicant into a queue that will process their applications in the order in which they were received. This system is currently being used for hunting license sales in Colorado, and it is our understanding that it is working very well.

Not all antlerless licenses will be sold on line. The 750 issuing agents located across the Commonwealth will continue to operate as they currently do with one exception, they will now be able to issue antlerless licenses over the counter. Keep in mind, this also includes our 65 County Treasurers who are also issuing agents.

With any new idea or proposal, the question of cost always comes up. What will the impact of this change be to the agency and even more importantly, what will the impact be to the consumer - the Pennsylvania hunter. In this particular case, there is actually going to be a savings for both.

We have done the research into this and for the PGC, we would see significant savings. On just the printing and shipping of the antlerless license application envelopes alone, we would save approximately \$109,000. Additionally, hunters who purchase their antlerless licenses over the counter at an issuing agent will save on postage. This may sound trivial, but the proposed change to utilize over the counter sales will currently save hunters \$0.98 per application envelope that they are now required to mail in. However, hunters utilizing the on line sales process would still be required to pay a postage fee.

Today's hunters want this change to take place and have been asking for it for years. We believe the Pennsylvania Automated License System is certainly capable of handling it and it is time to bring the antlerless license process into the 21st century.

I would like to thank Representative Mullery for introducing this important piece of legislation and thank this Committee for the opportunity to come in to testify today.

I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.