

House Game & Fisheries Committee

Public Hearing – HB 223 and HB 366

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 for providing the Game Commission the opportunity to come before you today in regards to legislation permitting the use of semiautomatic rifles for hunting.

Although certainly not a new topic of discussion, with increased production, quality, accuracy, and reliability of semiautomatic rifles over the past several years, we have seen an increased interest from Pennsylvania hunters to be permitted to use these firearms for hunting. In fact, many Pennsylvania hunters already own a semiautomatic rifle of some type and currently use them for target shooting or use them in shooting competitions.

Currently, the only states that entirely prohibit the use of semiautomatic rifles for hunting are Pennsylvania and Delaware. Many states, including most of our neighboring states, allow the use of semiautomatic rifles with restrictions to include caliber, magazine capacity, huntable species, and seasons.

We have heard from hunters and landowners alike who have expressed varied opinions that fall on both sides of this issue.

After reviewing the regulations in our neighboring states, there are several key components that we would prefer to see included in the semiautomatic rifle legislation. The most important aspect would be to give the Game Commission the authority to regulate the implementation of semiautomatic rifles for hunting just as we currently do for the use of traditional firearms and archery equipment. Part of this authority would be the ability to regulate caliber by species in order to maintain consistency with our existing hunting regulations.

Another key component would be a magazine capacity limited to five rounds. This does not include one round in the chamber, so the total carrying capacity would be limited to six rounds. A magazine capacity of five rounds would allow for quick follow-up shots that advocates want, while minimizing the safety and humane harvest concerns.

One of the primary concerns we have heard is in regard to the use of semiautomatic rifles during the big game seasons. In any legislation, we would like to see the huntable species limited to coyotes, foxes, and woodchucks, and to have the traditional deer, bear, turkey, and elk seasons excluded from the authorized semiautomatic rifle usage regardless of the species.

We are open to any discussions regarding semiautomatic rifle legislation, and welcome the opportunity to work with you on this bill.

Again, I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to come in to testify today and we would be happy to answer any questions at this time.