



pennsylvania

GOVERNOR'S YOUTH COUNCIL FOR
HUNTING, FISHING & CONSERVATION

The Honorable Keith Gillespie
45 East Wing
PO Box 202047
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2047

Dear Representative Gillespie:

My name is Emma Olney, and I'm writing to you on behalf of the Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing and Conservation. I was asked by my peers to submit comments for the record on the issue of opening the firearms season for deer on the Saturday after Thanksgiving instead of the following Monday.

As most conservationists in Pennsylvania know, the age-old sport of hunting has steadily decreased in popularity. According to the latest National Survey of Hunting, Fishing, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, we suffered a loss of 2.2 million hunters **nationally** between 2011 and 2016, with just 11.5 million people hunting in 2016.

Council commends the Pennsylvania Game Commission for trying something radically new last year to reverse this grim statistic. It may already be paying off!

It seems, at least in its first year, that the Saturday opener may have been successful in slowing the decline of hunting, and in starting a new, more inclusive, hunting tradition. Compared to 2018, license sales in 2019 increased modestly, with an additional 3,000 licenses sold. In a climate where 2-4% annual decreases in sales have sadly become the norm, being able to stop the hemorrhaging and earn a slight gain is no small feat.

Could this become a trend?

The only way we can find out is to continue the Saturday opener. Most prominently, this change will allow the next generation of hunters to gain experience in the field.

As you know, some high school students have traditionally had the Monday after Thanksgiving off but, increasingly, many school districts resume classes on that Monday, leaving students in a dilemma:

- whether to be out in the woods on opening day or
- stay caught up with their schoolwork in an increasingly competitive high school environment.

Most post-secondary institutions end the Thanksgiving break on the following Monday, further eliminating opportunities for college kids to go hunting. Remember too, that for students who travel great distances to return to college, Saturday is likely the only full day for hunting available on the one weekend that they have off!

As you know, hunters in this age cohort are extremely important to the future of hunting as they'll be the ones replacing the Baby Boomers. We recently learned that last year there was an increase in the number of licenses purchased by individuals aged 18-35! THE SATURDAY OPENER DID EXACTLY WHAT THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS HAD HOPED -- AND YOUNG PEOPLE RESPONDED!

And let's not forget the working women and men of the Commonwealth. For them, instituting a Saturday opener is one of the only ways they could be provided the opportunity to harvest a buck. Many can't afford to take a day off work to go hunting. For many, the experience of hunting ... the experience of getting to the field bright and early on the first day of the season, is ELIMINATED with a Monday opener! Perhaps that's one reason license sales have been in a slump all these years ... we haven't moved to where people are in life!

By allowing a Saturday opener:

- the firearms season is expanded to 13 days. Now you're being inclusive!

By allowing a Saturday opener:

- You've created a season that includes a total of three Saturdays. Now you're providing opportunity!
- Now you're making it convenient for Pennsylvanians of all ages to have the opportunity to hunt the majestic Whitetail.

The biggest opposition to shifting the opener to Saturday is that it diminishes long-held traditions and we respect that belief. Many sportsmen look forward to spending the weekend at camp, sighting rifles and visiting with family and friends they might only see at that time of year. But let's not disregard the opportunity for new traditions to be fostered.

In 1963, the Game Commission moved the opener from December 3rd to the Monday after Thanksgiving. Traditionalists, though ruffled at first, quickly evolved to accommodate this advantageous change. Old traditions seamlessly meld into new ones with time. Starting the season on Saturday will allow people of all ages, occupations, and backgrounds to participate in making timeless hunting memories.

The Governor's Youth Council believes that this change will benefit young people, slow the decline of hunting, and start new traditions that are more inclusive for an increasingly diverse hunting public.

Thank you for listening to our ideas.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Emma Olney".

Emma Olney, President

Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing and Conservation