

Good morning Chairwoman Kulik, Chairman Maloney, and members of the House Game and Fisheries Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and to provide the Game Commission's testimony on these important pieces of legislation.

First, I would like to commend Representative Steele on the approach you took in drafting these bills. You, and staff for the Committee, have included the Game Commission and a variety of stakeholders throughout this process, and the legislation shows the benefits of that approach.

Regarding HB 2108, the Game Commission has not historically taken a stance on legislation regarding the composition of the Board of Commissioners. We do not believe it would be appropriate for the agency to play a role in determining who will serve on the board. I can say however, that during my time as Executive Director, to my knowledge there has always been at least one board member who came from an agricultural background and understood the interests of that community. This legislation would ensure that practice continues.

For HB 2017, the Game Commission recognizes the importance of these provisions, and if passed, will work to implement them efficiently and effectively. I would note that some of what is contained in the bill regarding the processing of deer that were removed for crop damage is already starting to take place, and if this were to become law, we would increase those efforts and make sure the practice was uniform across the state.

And finally, I'd like to talk about HB 2106, and in particular, the section that removes the prohibition on Sunday hunting, and would allow Pennsylvania to join the ranks of the 39 other states that have no statutory restriction on hunting on Sundays. But before talking about the prospect of additional Sunday hunting, I believe it is important to first start with what has

happened recently, as the past four years are indicative of what would happen if this bill were passed.

The General Assembly took an important first step toward modernizing the law regarding hunting on Sundays with the passage of Act 107 of 2019, which allowed for additional Sunday hunting to occur on three days – one during firearms deer season, one during archery deer season, and one on a date determined by the Game Commission Board of Commissioners. Since this Act has been in effect, the Board has set the third Sunday hunting day during the firearms bear season.

In the years since the law was changed, the additional days of hunting opportunities have been popular with hunters. A recent survey of active hunters found that over sixty percent of those questioned said they have taken advantage of at least one of the additional Sundays. The Sunday that takes place at the beginning of the firearms deer season has been, not surprisingly, the most popular, with over 90 percent of those who have hunted on a Sunday, hunting on that date.

Another indication of the popularity of the increased opportunities among our hunters is the fact that during the past 4 years license sales have remained at consistent levels. This is remarkable when considering that the nationwide trend is for licenses to decline over three percent per-year. But we have not seen that in Pennsylvania.

Additionally, over the same period since Sunday hunting went into effect, the safety record of Pennsylvania hunters has remained exemplary. There has not been a single incident in which a non-hunter was mistaken for game or injured by being in the line of fire. The concerns that expanded Sunday hunting would create safety conflicts between hunters and members of

the public have not materialized. This is particularly significant given the popularity that hunting deer on a Sunday of the beginning of firearms deer season has generated. That date is much more than just another Sunday, but one of peak hunter participation, far exceeding that which would occur on any other Sunday on the calendar. For there to not be any safety incidents between hunters and members of the public on that Sunday speaks volumes about the ability of hunters and other outdoor recreationists to coincide. It also seems to indicate that Sunday hunting could be further implemented at times when hunter participation would be much lower than it is on that Sunday.

It is important to note that the passage of HB 2106 would not automatically result in Sunday hunting being available on every Sunday of the year but will allow the Board of Commissioners to decide which seasons should include Sundays after considering the biological impact on species and the feedback from stakeholders, such as those who are here in attendance today.

An example of how the board would look to implement Sunday hunting comes from the passage of the legislation which authorized the board to adopt regulations permitting the use of semiautomatic rifles. When exercising that authority, the board first solicited input from the public and directed that a survey be completed to measure the opinions of licensed hunters. After the survey showed that a clear majority of hunters favored the use of semiautomatic rifles for small game hunting, but opposed their use for big game hunting, the board adopted regulations consistent with those results, and those regulations have remained in place up to today. In taking a measured approach, the board demonstrated its commitment to considering

the interest of stakeholders as part of its decision-making process, and only exercising its authority when there is clear support for doing so.

The board would use that same approach toward implementing further Sunday hunting opportunities, ensuring that it is done through a transparent and deliberative process that takes into consideration a variety of stakeholders.

It is for these reasons, that I am pleased to offer the Game Commission's full support for the legislation to remove the statutory barrier to Sunday hunting. We believe that doing so is within the best long-term interests of the sportsmen and women of the Commonwealth, and the scientific management of wildlife.

I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have.