

# COALITION OF CONNECTICUT SPORTSMEN

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Testimony presented to the **ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**IN SUPPORT of RAISED Bill 5120 AN ACT CONCERNING HUNTING AND FISHING LICENSES, IMPROVING SAFE HUNTING EDUCATION AND AMENDING DEFINITIONS FOR THE WILDLIFE DIVISION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION.**

by Robert T. Crook, Director.

02/22/12

The major component of this bill is Section 5 which is an attempt to increase participation in hunting and fishing by decreasing the fee for any firearms hunting, archery hunting, trapping or sport fishing permit, tag or stamp by 50% purchased by those seventeen and eighteen years of age. Current "Junior Licenses" are available for those 12 to 16.

We believe this fee adjustment will help promote new sportsmen participation, increase long-term revenues for the DEEP, and continue sound wildlife and fisheries management. For the last two decades sportsmen have seen substantial license fee increases, which have caused participation decreases in all age groups and combined with activities available to new generations (Soccer, Computers, etc.) recruitment and retention of juniors has significantly suffered. Visiting sportsmen's clubs, shows, and events, one sees too many "Grey Beards" and few of the young generations. Without increased participation by new generations, who will be the future "field managers" taking excess populations to help conform to the ecological population balances DEEP is tasked by statute to achieve?

This proposal is a short term test to achieve its goal and had to be revenue neutral to the budget. But, CT is not the only state recognizing the junior recruitment problem. Several states have initiated similar legislation and Massachusetts has passed FREE licenses for all teenagers.

Section 3 of the bill on-line education services is another positive example of DEEP outreach to recruit new hunters. However, there are mixed emotions from the 300+ Conservation Education/Firearms Safety Instructors (CEFS) on the loss of personal contact. Many are also not clear on whether this is a retail operation or conducted by DEEP. New costs placed on the student is contrary to fee reductions in Section 5. In any event, one day actual instructor contact teaching field safety/actual shooting instruction must be included. The concept is good, but we feel the language must be more definitive.

An issue contrary to recruitment and retention of juniors is found in the **Governor's Midterm Budget Adjustments** under DEEP, p.67, the following statement is found: **"Reduce Funding for Sportsmen's Programs - Funding is eliminated for the pheasant stocking program \$ - 160,000." Pheasant Hunting is a Gateway Activity for new hunters; the Pheasant Stocking Program is Sportsmen funded and is self sustaining - NOTHING comes from the General Fund; and the economic impact of eliminating Pheasant Hunting is substantial.** Legislating at cross-purposes?

The remainder of the bill consists of basically technical changes of which we approve.

Thank you