To: Joint Committee on Finance, Revenue and Bonding  
Legislative Office Building, #3700  
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: HB 5040 – To Establish an Excise Tax on Ammunition to Increase Funding for Gun Violence Prevention and Reduction Efforts.

Position: Oppose

Date: February 27, 2020

Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Finance, Revenue and Bonding:

My name is Joseph Mullin and I am the New England States Senior Coordinator for the Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation (CSF). I respectfully urge you to oppose House Bill 5040 (HB 5040) – legislation that would establish an excise tax on ammunition and direct it towards gun violence prevention and reduction efforts. Connecticut’s sportsmen and women are the backbone of the funding structure for conservation efforts that benefit wildlife and their habitat throughout the state, as well as the citizenry at large, and HB 5040 is very likely to result in an unintended and consequential diminishment of the state’s conservation funding. Unfortunately, the intended purpose of this bill – to increase funding for gun violence prevention and reduction – is being pursued through an avenue that levies a significant and unnecessary tax on law-abiding sportsmen and women, who are already taxed on these products to provide the conservation funding necessary for the work of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), from which all citizens of the state benefit.

For more than 80 years, sportsmen and women have been the primary funders of state-level conservation efforts in this state and are thus an important constituency that provides benefits for all Connecticut residents. In 2019 alone, Connecticut’s sportsmen and women generated over $15 million dollars for conservation through revenue derived from license sales and excise taxes on sporting-related goods (including ammunition) in the unique “user-pays, public-benefits” structure known as the American System of Conservation Funding (ASCF). The funds collected through this program are the lifeblood of state fish and wildlife agencies, including the DEEP – the primary manager of Connecticut’s fish and wildlife resources. These critical conservation dollars fund a variety of efforts including: enhanced fish and wildlife habitat and populations, recreational access to public and private lands, shooting ranges and boat access facilities,
wetlands protection and its associated water filtration and flood retention functions, and improved soil and water conservation – all which benefit the public at large, not just sportsmen and women.

Enacted in 1937, the Pittman-Robertson Act redirected previously existing excise taxes on firearms and ammunition to a dedicated fund to be used specifically for wildlife conservation purposes. Once collected, the taxes are deposited into the Wildlife Restoration Account, which is administered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Under the Pittman-Robertson Act and per the Firearms and Ammunition Excise Tax, shells and cartridges are subjected to an 11% excise tax. Ultimately, it was sportsmen and women who decided to avail themselves to this excise tax – a choice prompted in sole consideration of the interest and betterment of the nation’s fish and wildlife, and the habitats that they rely on. By subjecting purchasers of ammunition to an additional 35% tax, HB 5040 will undoubtedly curtail sales and therefore deflect much-needed conservation dollars away from the DEEP, inhibiting the Department from effectively carrying-out its mission. Arguably, the parties most significantly harmed by this bill will be the recreational shooters who will be priced out of participation, but all citizens will be negatively impacted by the loss of conservation dollars.

It is widely recognized that recreational target shooters, who per-capita, spend even more money on firearms and ammunition than hunters, are the financial keystone for the ASCF. According to a National Shooting Sports Foundation estimate, “80 percent of Pittman-Robertson excise tax contributions are generated by sales attributed to recreational shooting.” By implementing an additional 35% ammunition tax, these firearms enthusiasts will be subjected to an unnecessary and unjust financial burden, resulting in the likely effect of lost conservation funds. There is no question that conservation funding in this nation is in need of immediate support; imposing this tax and dis-incentivizing spending is a step in the wrong direction.

In recognition of the negative bearings that HB 5040 would have on Connecticut’s sportsmen and women, along with the loss in conservation funds that the state would likely experience as a result of this bill, CSF stands in firm opposition. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this issue. Should you require additional information on this, or other sportsmen-related topics, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

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