

February 20, 2026

Testimony of Joshua Levin, Legislative & Advocacy Manager

In OPPOSITION to SB 146 – An Act Concerning The Protection of Livestock From Certain Wildlife

Thank you, distinguished members of the Environment Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony opposing SB 146.

Policy Without Precision: Legal Loophole for a Bear Killing Spree

If SB 146 becomes law, the consequences will be profound and irreversible.

This bill raises a simple, yet critical question: how would anyone know whether the bear seen this year is the same bear that allegedly caused damage during the previous growing season?

The honest answer is – we wouldn't.

According to a conversation with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's (DEEP) Wildlife Division earlier this week, the verification process to determine crop damage eluded to in this bill would consist of photo evidence submitted to DEEP by the property owner. So, in almost all cases there would be no tagging or tracking performed. This means SB 146 would authorize killing bears based on past damage without requiring proof that the animal being killed is the same animal that caused the damage.

This leads to a troubling reality: **if SB 146 passes, any bear seen this year could be killed, even if that bear has not caused any damage.**

This bill would create a legal loophole that dramatically lowers the threshold for lethal action and risks turning isolated incidents into an unnecessary bear killing spree. Bear management policy should be precise, evidence-based, and focused on preventing conflict—not expanding killing opportunities without clear standards.

Human Behavior Causes Bear Conflicts

According to DEEP's 2025 State of the Bears report, Connecticut's bear population is estimated at approximately 1,100, roughly one-third the size of the next smallest bear population in the Northeast.¹ Despite this, in 2023 Connecticut reported **3,093 bear conflicts** – more than three times higher than any of the neighboring states referenced.¹ Even more striking, Connecticut has reported **three times more bear home entries per 100 bears** than surrounding states.¹

This data highlights the key point: **the problem is not the number of bears.**

If population size was the problem, states like Maine – home to the largest population of black bears (26,000) in the eastern United States² – would experience exponentially higher reports. Yet in 2023, Maine reported just **645 conflicts**.¹

¹ Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. (2025). The state of the bears: A briefing on bears in Connecticut. https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/deep/wildlife/pdf_files/2025-the-state-of-the-bears.pdf

² Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife. (n.d.). Living with Black Bears. <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/wildlife/living-with-wildlife/avoid-resolve-conflict/bears.html>

This stark contrast is impossible to ignore. Connecticut has far fewer bears yet far more conflicts. The issue is not bear overpopulation, it is human behavior: unsecured trash, easily accessible food sources, inconsistent deterrence policies, and a lack of public education.

SB 146 targets the symptom, not the cause. It weakens non-lethal preventative provisions without strengthening deterrence programs. **The true solution is prevention, education, and accountability.**

I urge the committee to oppose SB 146 and focus on addressing the root cause of the problem.

Bear Hunting Authorization, Amount Hunted, & Public Education Programs

State	Bear Hunting ¹	Average Amount Hunted Per Year ¹	Population Percent ¹	Public Education Program
Massachusetts	Yes	245	5%	Yes ³
Maine	Yes	3272	12.5%	Yes ⁴
New Hampshire	Yes	712	12%	Yes ⁵
New Jersey	Yes	473	16%	Yes ⁶
New York	Yes	1356	20%	Yes ⁷
Vermont	Yes	837	12%	Yes ⁸
West Virginia	Yes	2830	19%	Yes ⁹

“A fed bear is a dead bear. That maxim is familiar to most people who live in bear country. Why do bears pay the price? Because intentional feeding alters behavior. The best scenario for both people and wildlife is for animals to remain wild. Feeding habituates wildlife, causing the animals to lose wariness and seek additional food sources around homes and people. This learned behavior can span many bear generations as sows teach their cubs how to take advantage of food opportunities.”¹⁰

“As black bears in New Jersey continue to adapt to living in closer proximity to people and human development, they learn to take advantage of human-derived food sources. Fish and Wildlife has been conducting an intensive public education and outreach campaign to teach residents, hikers, anglers and campers about how to safely coexist with black bears and minimize negative interactions. Efforts have included presentations to school children, civic organizations, communities and other groups, as well as the development of an educational videos, public service announcements, brochures, signs and other educational materials. The black bear education program was awarded a national award for excellence in 1999.”⁶

³ Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. (n.d.). Black Bears in Massachusetts. <https://www.mass.gov/black-bears-in-massachusetts>

⁴ Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife. (n.d.). Living with Black Bears. <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/wildlife/living-with-wildlife/avoid-resolve-conflict/bears.html>

⁵ New Hampshire Fish and Game Department. (n.d.). Black Bears in New Hampshire. <https://www.wildlife.nh.gov/wildlife-and-habitat/black-bears-new-hampshire>

⁶ New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. (n.d.). Black Bear Education in New Jersey. <https://dep.nj.gov/njfw/bears/black-bear-education-in-new-jersey/>

⁷ New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. (n.d.). Be BearWise. <https://dec.ny.gov/nature/animals-fish-plants/black-bear/management/bearwise>

⁸ Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department. (n.d.). Living with Black Bears. <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/learn-more/living-with-wildlife/living-with-black-bears>

⁹ West Virginia Division of Natural Resources. (n.d.). Bearwise Tips for Avoiding Nuisance Bears. <https://wvdnr.gov/bearwise-tips/>

¹⁰ Massachusetts Wildlife (2022). Spearfishing, Intentional Wildlife Feeding, Mass. Outdoor Heritage Foundation. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/the-stockbridge-solution-combating-increasing-human-bear-conflicts/download>