



NEW ENGLAND BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS AND ANGLERS

October 11, 2023

Attn: House Committee on Ways and Means

Re: HD.4607 - An Act Modernizing Firearms Laws

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA) seeks to ensure North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting. Protecting and enhancing access and opportunity to public lands and waters is a top priority to our members, and we actively pursue solutions at the state and federal level to ensure our public lands legacy persists. With these priorities in mind, the New England Chapter of BHA respectfully urges that the legislature alter the proposed language in HD.4607 to protect youth hunting and hunter access in Massachusetts. BHA has provided this written testimony of our concerns with specific language in the Act as currently written.

BHA does not typically comment on 2A legislation specifically, but a detailed read of the proposed language seems to create two major hunting-related impacts (youth hunting and hunter land access):

Under HD.4607 youth hunters will be restricted in what they can use in the field, specifically no semi-automatic rifles or shotguns. The proposed law creates a new "long gun permit" that replaces our current FID that will apply to everyone 18 years old and younger. It also creates a definition of "common long gun" that excludes all semi-automatic rifles and shotguns. Currently, rifles .22 caliber and smaller (including semi-automatic) are allowed for small game (squirrel, rabbit, etc.) in the western half of the state. And shotguns (including semi-automatic) are currently allowed throughout Massachusetts for small game, turkey, deer, and waterfowl. These semi-automatic firearms have been used by youth hunters safely for decades as they offer reduced recoil for small shooters, creating a safer and more comfortable shooting experience. For additional details you can refer to the state's hunting and fishing guide; pages 18-44 (<https://www.mass.gov/doc/2023-massachusetts-fishing-and-hunting-guide/download>).

Under HD.4607 affecting all hunting, it is unclear if unposted private land can be still hunted with a firearm without written permission from a landowner. This is a fundamental change from historical land access rights protected by law. Under current regulations (unless prohibited by city/town regulations) hunters, for the purposes of hunting, are allowed to access unposted land as long as all other regulated setbacks are maintained to roads and buildings. And there are indemnifications for private landowners so they are not liable for hunters. (<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/hunting-on-private-property-in-massachusetts>). This access is a right going back to the creation of our state and critical to the hunting community in a state that has relatively little state/federal public lands open to all and that allow hunting. In states without our current protections, access to wildlife (which are held in the state's trust for the benefit of all) is heavily commodified by private landowners. Our current protections also mean large tracts of land, like those held by paper companies or utility corridors, are accessible to any hunter. While getting a landowners permission is always recommended, there are many situations (especially on those large tracts with corporate owners) where granting individual access isn't feasible and the end result will be a massive reduction in access for hunters not able or not willing to pay for private access.

We urge the legislature to consider the impacts of the proposed bill on hunting in Massachusetts and make the necessary changes to explicitly protect youth hunting by allowing youth hunters to use semi-automatic firearms and to explicitly protect hunting access on privately-owned unposted lands in the language of the law.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "A. Townsley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Aaron Townsley
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New England Chapter – Massachusetts State Leadership Team (Pat Saunders, Christopher Todd, Allison Crim, et al.)
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers