

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

Senate Bill 181

(Senator Lewis Young, *et al.*)

Education, Energy, and the Environment

Rules and Executive Nominations

Hunting - Restrictions of Venison Donation

This bill requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to prohibit a person from donating processed deer meat to a venison donation program administered by a tax exempt § 501(c)(3) organization unless the deer was harvested using nonlead ammunition or a bow and arrow. The bill establishes a civil fine for a violation of the prohibition, and DNR must adopt regulations to carry out the prohibition and report by December 1, 2030, on specified violations of the prohibition. The bill also modifies an existing requirement that DNR set forth any restrictions relating to weapons used to hunt designated wildlife, to specify that the restrictions may include restrictions relating to the type of ammunition used for hunting designated game birds or mammals. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2027.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill is not anticipated to have a direct, material impact on State finances. DNR indicates that it can implement the bill and enforce the prohibition with existing resources and any civil fines collected are not expected to materially affect State finances. The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) notes that it is unclear what impact the bill may have on the level of donations to venison donation programs and whether there may be any indirect fiscal impacts associated with any resulting change in the level of tax credits claimed or grants provided under the venison donation tax credit and Venison Donation Grant Program, both discussed below under Current Law.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The bill requires DNR to prohibit a person from donating processed deer meat to a venison donation program administered by an organization that is exempt from taxation under § 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code unless the deer was harvested using nonlead ammunition or a bow and arrow. “Nonlead ammunition” includes (1) ammunition in which there is less than 1% lead content and (2) any federally approved nontoxic ammunition. A person who violates the prohibition is subject to a civil fine of up to \$750 for a first offense. DNR must (1) adopt regulations to carry out these provisions and (2) by December 1, 2030, report to the Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment and the House Environment and Transportation Committee on inspections performed by the Natural Resources Police Force detailing violations of the prohibition in venison processing facilities.

The bill also modifies an existing provision that requires DNR to (1) prescribe by regulation the means or weapons for hunting designated wildlife and (2) set forth any restrictions relating to weapons used to hunt designated wildlife, including the amount and size of ammunition for designated game birds or mammals. The bill modifies the provision by specifying that any restrictions set forth relating to weapons used to hunt designated wildlife may include restrictions relating to the type of ammunition used for hunting designated game birds or mammals.

Current Law:

Hunting in Maryland – Generally

With certain exceptions, a person must have a Maryland resident or nonresident hunting license to hunt or attempt to hunt all legal game birds and mammals during the appropriate season in the State. In general, a person must obtain a certificate of competency in firearms and hunter safety before obtaining a hunting license by successfully completing a course of instruction in conservation and in competency and safety in the handling of firearms. In addition to a hunting license, a stamp is required for a hunter to use certain types of equipment or hunt certain kinds of game.

More information on hunting licenses and stamps can be found in DLS’s [Maryland Fishing and Hunting Licenses, Permits, and Stamps](#) report.

Department of Natural Resources Regulation of Means or Weapons for Hunting

DNR must prescribe by regulation the means or weapons for hunting designated wildlife and set forth any restrictions relating to weapons used to hunt designated wildlife, including the amount and size of ammunition for designated game birds or mammals.

Venison Donation Tax Credit

Chapters 769 and 770 reauthorized, with modifications, the nonrefundable venison donation income tax credit for tax years 2024 through 2028. (The credit was previously authorized for tax years 2018 through 2022, and the program terminated June 30, 2023.) Per Chapters 769 and 770, an individual who hunts and harvests an antlerless deer for donation to a venison donation program administered by an organization that is exempt from taxation under § 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code may claim a nonrefundable credit of up to \$75 of expenses incurred to butcher and process an antlerless deer for human consumption if the hunting and harvesting of the deer complies with State hunting laws and regulations. An individual may not claim more than \$300 in tax credits in any tax year unless the individual harvested each deer for which the credits are claimed in accordance with a deer management permit. Any amount of unused credit may not be carried over to any other tax year. The program terminates June 30, 2029.

Venison Donation Grant Program

Chapter 446 of 2021 established the Venison Donation Grant Program within DNR to provide grants to defray the cost of butchering and processing deer that are donated to venison donation programs in the State. Subject to the availability of funds, a county, a municipal corporation, or an organization that is exempt from taxation under § 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code may apply for a grant from the program for the costs of butchering and processing deer that are (1) hunted in compliance with State hunting laws and regulations; (2) donated to a program administered by the applicant that provides nutritional support or food for low-income individuals or the homeless; and (3) have a dressed weight of at least 50 pounds. The grant program is not subject to termination.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - January 30, 2026
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Analysis by: Beatrice F. Amoateng

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510