

SENATE BILL 181

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6lr0628

(PRE-FILED)

By: ~~Senator Lewis Young~~ Senators Lewis Young, Brooks, Harris, Kagan, M. Washington, Watson, and West

Requested: July 7, 2025

Introduced and read first time: January 14, 2026

Assigned to: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Committee Report: Favorable with amendments

Senate action: Adopted with floor amendments

Read second time: March 21, 2026

CHAPTER _____

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Hunting - ~~Lead and Lead-Based Ammunition Phase Out~~ Restrictions of**
3 **Venison Donation**

4 FOR the purpose of requiring the Department of Natural Resources to ~~require, through a~~
5 ~~certain phasing out process, the use of nonlead ammunition for the hunting of all~~
6 ~~game species on or before a certain date~~ prohibit the donation of certain processed
7 venison to certain entities except under certain circumstances; ~~establishing a certain~~
8 penalty for a first violation of this Act, subject to a certain termination date; and
9 generally relating to ~~phasing out the use of lead or lead-based ammunition for~~
10 ~~hunting venison donation.~~

11 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
12 Article – Natural Resources
13 Section 10–408
14 Annotated Code of Maryland
15 (2023 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

16 ~~BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,~~
17 ~~Article – Natural Resources~~
18 ~~Section 10–408(e)~~
19 ~~Annotated Code of Maryland~~
20 ~~(2023 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)~~
21 ~~(As enacted by Section 1 of this Act)~~

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

Underlining indicates amendments to bill.

~~Strike out~~ indicates matter stricken from the bill by amendment or deleted from the law by amendment.



Preamble

1
2 WHEREAS, The 1991 federal ban on the use of lead ammunition in waterfowl
3 hunting is considered one of the greatest conservation and animal welfare achievements in
4 wildlife management in the last century; and

5 WHEREAS, The federal ban on the use of lead ammunition in waterfowl hunting
6 saves over 1.4 million ducks annually from lead poisoning, enabling larger fall flights of
7 ducks and geese, and increasing opportunities for hunters; and

8 WHEREAS, England, Scotland, and Wales will phase out the use of lead ammunition
9 by 2029 in recognition of the serious cumulative health and environmental impacts on
10 humans and animals; and

11 WHEREAS, Over 500 peer-reviewed studies recognize that there is no safe level of
12 lead exposure for humans; and

13 ~~WHEREAS, Peer-reviewed studies have shown that individuals working at shooting~~
14 ~~ranges have developed severe toxicity and increased health challenges as a result of~~
15 ~~exposure to lead ammunition; and~~

16 WHEREAS, Peer-reviewed studies have proven that there is a direct connection
17 between the use of lead ammunition and an increase in health, neurological, emotional,
18 and intellectual deficiencies in humans; and

19 WHEREAS, It has been shown that the shattering of lead ammunition upon striking
20 bone in an animal can spread into dozens of lead fragments that are not readily visible by
21 the naked eye, but are detectable using X-ray technology; and

22 WHEREAS, Over 50,000 deer are killed by firearms in the State annually, and the
23 meat is consumed by hunters and family members; and

24 WHEREAS, Venison is donated in substantial amounts to food banks, and those
25 receiving the donated meat may be unknowingly ingesting lead; and

26 WHEREAS, Wildlife, such as the bald eagle, are being poisoned by ingesting lead
27 particles that are left in abandoned pieces of animal carcasses; ~~and~~

28 ~~WHEREAS, The health care system, educational system, and criminal justice system~~
29 ~~are being unnecessarily burdened by exposure to and ingestion of lead ammunition; now,~~
30 therefore,

31 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
32 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

33 **Article – Natural Resources**

1 10-408.

2 (a) (1) In this section[, “handgun”] **THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE**
3 **MEANINGS INDICATED.**

4 (2) **“HANDGUN”** means a firearm:

5 [(1)] (I) With a barrel length not exceeding 6 inches; and

6 [(2)] (II) That does not have a scope or an electronic device attached.

7 (3) **“NONLEAD AMMUNITION” INCLUDES:**

8 (I) **AMMUNITION IN WHICH THERE IS LESS THAN 1% LEAD**
9 **CONTENT; AND**

10 (II) **ANY FEDERALLY APPROVED NONTOXIC AMMUNITION.**

11 (b) (1) Except as provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection, the Department
12 shall:

13 (i) Prescribe by regulation the means or weapons for hunting
14 designated wildlife; and

15 (ii) Set forth any restrictions relating to weapons used to hunt
16 designated wildlife, including the amount [and], size, **AND TYPE** of ammunition for
17 designated game birds or mammals.

18 (2) The Department may not prohibit a licensed bow hunter from openly
19 carrying a handgun that the hunter is otherwise authorized to carry under § 4-203 of the
20 Criminal Law Article if the bow hunter:

21 (i) Is at least 21 years old;

22 (ii) Is hunting in deer management Region A as defined by the
23 Department’s Guide to Hunting and Trapping;

24 (iii) Is carrying the handgun for personal protection; and

25 (iv) Does not use the handgun to kill wildlife wounded by a vertical
26 bow or crossbow.

27 (c) The Department shall make the regulations available for distribution with
28 each hunting license purchased.

(d) This section does not authorize the Department to restrict the use of firearms except in the activity of hunting designated wildlife.

~~(E) (1) EXCEPT AS PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH (2) OF THIS SUBSECTION, ON OR BEFORE JULY 1, 2029-2030, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL REQUIRE THE USE OF NONLEAD AMMUNITION FOR THE HUNTING OF ALL GAME SPECIES.~~

~~(2) (I) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL AUTHORIZE THE USE OF LEAD AMMUNITION FOR MUZZLELOADERS, HANDGUNS, RIFLES, AND SHOTGUNS IF NONLEAD AMMUNITION IS NOT COMMERCIALY AVAILABLE FOR THE SPECIFIC UNLESS THE DEER WAS HARVESTED USING NONLEAD AMMUNITION OR A BOW AND ARROW, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL 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 WEAPON FIREARM.~~

~~(H) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL AUTHORIZE THE USE OF LEAD AMMUNITION BY AN INDIVIDUAL HUNTING DEER UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF A DEER MANAGEMENT PERMIT ON OR BEFORE JUNE 30, 2031.~~

~~(3) (2) A PERSON WHO VIOLATES REGULATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT REQUIRING THE USE OF NONLEAD AMMUNITION FOR HUNTING THE PROHIBITION IN PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION FOR A FIRST OFFENSE IS SUBJECT TO A CIVIL FINE NOT EXCEEDING \$750.~~

~~(4) (3) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL ADOPT REGULATIONS TO CARRY OUT THIS SUBSECTION.~~

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That, on or before December 1, 2030, the Department of Natural Resources shall report to the Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment and the House Environment and Transportation Committee, in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State Government Article, on inspections performed by the Natural Resources Police Force detailing violations in venison processing facilities under § 10-408(e) of the Natural Resources Article, as enacted by Section 1 of this Act.

~~SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:~~

~~Article — Natural Resources~~

~~10-408.~~

~~(e) (1) Except as provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection, on or before July 1, 2030, the Department shall require the use of nonlead ammunition for the hunting of all game species.~~

~~(2) (i) The Department shall authorize the use of lead ammunition for muzzleloaders, handguns, rifles, and shotguns if nonlead ammunition is not commercially available for the specific firearm.~~

~~(ii) The Department shall authorize the use of lead ammunition by an individual hunting deer under the authority of a deer management permit on or before June 30, 2031.~~

~~(3) [A person who violates regulations of the Department requiring the use of nonlead ammunition for hunting for a first offense is subject to a civil fine not exceeding \$750.~~

~~(4) The Department shall adopt regulations to carry out this subsection.~~

~~SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That:~~

~~(a) On or before July 1, 2027, the Department of Natural Resources shall adopt regulations requiring the use of nonlead ammunition for hunting pen-raised birds on regulated shooting areas.~~

~~(b) On or before July 1, 2028, the Department of Natural Resources shall adopt regulations requiring the use of nonlead ammunition for hunting:~~

~~(1) upland game birds;~~

~~(2) webless migratory game birds; and~~

~~(3) wild turkey.~~

~~(c) On or before July 1, 2029, the Department of Natural Resources shall adopt regulations requiring nonlead ammunition for:~~

~~(1) muzzleloaders, handguns, rifles, and shotguns used for hunting deer;~~
~~and~~

~~(2) hunting any other game species not specified in this section.~~

~~SECTION 3. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That Section 2 of this Act shall take effect January 1, 2031.~~

~~SECTION 3. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That, except as provided in Section 3 of this Act, this Act shall take effect July 1, 2026 2027.~~