



Statement of
Jo-Anne Basile, Executive Director
CT Votes for Animals
In Opposition to SB 586
Joint Committee on the Environment
March 1, 2019

Senate Co-Chair Cohen, House Co-Chair Demicco, Vice Chairs Senator Kushner and Representative Gresko, Ranking Senator Miner and Ranking Representative Harding, Honorable Members of the Environment Committee.

CT Votes for Animals is a grass roots animal advocacy organization representing 3,000 citizens across the State of Connecticut. CVA members care deeply that Connecticut provides a safe and humane environment for all its animals. CVA speaks up for animals as a reminder to the public that a compassionate world is good for all and one in which we should all want to live in.

CVA strongly opposes SB 586, authorizing a Black Bear Hunt in Litchfield County. Animal advocates and the majority of residents in the State oppose the hunting of bears in CT. There are science-based and effective solutions to problems with nuisance bears – those bears we often see featured on local news or posted on social media - which should be implemented rather than relying on antiquated and ineffective inhumane methods.

Hunting is the Wrong Approach:

- Scientific studies demonstrate that recreational hunting is not effective in solving problems with nuisance bears. For example, a UCONN study showed that the majority of encounters with bears are found in exurban and suburban neighborhoods, obviously not a safe environment for hunting.
- Hunting is counter-productive because it's the non-problem bears who are killed in the more rural areas where hunting is allowed while not having any effect on the behavior of the more suburban bears whose behavior may be causing a problem.
- Hunting is not without risk: hunters in Connecticut killed 10 people and injured 114 in hunting accidents between 1982 and 2016.

Hunting Bears is Out of Step with the Majority of Ct Voters

- More than 1.2 million residents participate in wildlife watching, a number that has grown exponentially.
- Wildlife watchers bring in over \$935 million to the State's economy.
- In contrast, the number of hunters has been steadily decreasing representing less than 1 percent of the State's population.
- Farmers and others already have the right to use force in protecting their property

What's Needed:

The Environment Committee is to be commended for introducing SB 894 a bill directing DEEP to identify nonlethal management practices that can be employed to deter black bears from habituating in areas densely populated by humans. However, CVA encourages the Committee to add provisions to the bill that would require DEEP to formally engage and collaborate with humane wildlife organizations in investigating and developing a recommended approach for non-lethal management practices. Without this collaboration CVA is concerned that the report will not take advantage of new humane strategies and merely repeat ineffective programs of the past.

In addition, any set of recommendations needs to include a strong program to educate the public about how to prevent bear conflicts and prevent their habituation. DEEP's actions of limited public education and posting signs at some state parks is not sufficient; what's needed is a widespread, well-publicized, and coordinated educational campaign featuring effective co-existence messaging.

- This means having education material on town websites and media/ social media, the development of a comprehensive DEEP response to bear encounters, using effective deterrent methods and removal only where truly warranted.
- As communities continue to develop and encroach on wildlife habitat, there is a growing need to better understand and be prepared to deter and respond to bear encounters.
- Communities should take advantage of Get Bear Smart www.bearsmart.com an on-line free resource which offers simple guidelines, Bear Smart – Resident Guide - to ensure any encounters with bears are handled appropriately.

Overwhelmingly, the people of Connecticut don't want a bear hunt, but they do want an effective way of managing conflicts. CT Votes for Animals, wildlife ecologists and other humane organizations in the State are a resource and want to work with the State to bring an effective and humane resolution to Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our opposition to SB 586. The Committee has offered a viable and thoughtful alternative in SB 894. With some modifications CVA believes this bill provides the best opportunity for the State to address its wildlife in a thoughtful and humane manner.