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Feb. 8th, 2021

Senate Business, Labor and Economic Affairs Committee
1301 East Sixth Avenue
Room 422
Helena, MT 59601

Re: Senate Bill 275

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Walker Conyngham and I am here to testify on behalf of Hellgate Hunters & Anglers, an all-volunteer Western Montana-based organization that represents over 400 sportsmen and women. We strongly oppose Senate Bill 275, as its intent is to remove any accountability for outfitters to the general public. By removing the two sportsmen's seats from the board, this legislation suggests that we should not have any role or insight into the ways in which outfitters use our lands and wildlife.

The outfitting industry is vital to Montana's outdoor economy. Hunters, both resident and nonresident, utilize the services that outfitters provide. My organization has great relationships with outfitters across the state who donate trips for our annual fundraisers to support our work. We do not believe this bill represents their interests or ours. In fact, by removing reporting requirements, FWP enforcement ability and the two sportsmen's seats from the board, this bill will further the divide between resident hunters and outfitters, which has already widened during this session. I ask that you consider these consequences and the external appearance of this legislation.

Although many outfitters across the state operate solely on private ground, there is a significant number who use our public lands to support their businesses. Their use of public resources, public lands and public wildlife dictates that they should be accountable to the public for their actions. I would like to note that illegal outfitting is a real problem in many western states, yet we have managed to keep it minimal in Montana, with some notable exceptions. This bill, by removing reporting requirements and disarming FWP wardens from investigating illegal outfitting, will foster abuse by bad actors among the outfitting community.

We ask that you table SB 275.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment,

Walker Conyngham
President
Hellgate Hunters & Anglers

