

*Date:* February 21, 2024

*To:* Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

*From:* Katie Nolan, Citizen & In Defense of Animals Campaigner

*Re:* Copy of Verbal Testimony In Support of S.258

Good morning, my name is Katie Nolan and I'm here to speak in support of S.258. I am the Wild Animals Campaign Specialist at In Defense of Animals, a nonprofit animal protection organization with over 800 members in the state of Vermont, and I serve on the advisory board of Protect Our Wildlife. I am also a resident of Richmond, Vermont and I hold a masters degree in Environmental Law and Policy from Vermont Law and Graduate School.

While hunting, trapping, and fishing license holders bring valuable perspectives on wildlife management, it's crucial to recognize that expertise extends beyond their community. Photographers, hikers, bird watchers, scientists—all possess unique insights and knowledge essential to comprehensive wildlife management. I myself do not hunt, fish, or trap, but am an avid trail runner and spend hours each day in the woods observing wildlife.

*Our* request has not been for a complete overhaul of the existing system. Rather, we're advocating for inclusion and asking that non-license holders be given a designated seat at the decision-making table where our voices can contribute meaningfully to policy discussions. This is precisely what S.258 does, all while leaving the ultimate rulemaking authority in the hands of the scientists at the Fish and Wildlife Department.

It's imperative to acknowledge that hunting, trapping, and fishing do not happen in a vacuum; they exist within a complex ecosystem where their impacts can extend far beyond the immediate target species. Thus it is crucial to bring more diverse perspectives into the conversation and evaluate the broader impacts of these practices on other game species and non-game species, and their habitats.

If I may conclude by reiterating something that a member of this committee said after testimony was given earlier this week, *"This type of dialogue keeps me optimistic about Vermont, we can sit in a room and listen to each other. The heart of this bill is respect for other ways of thinking and living here."* It is my hope that with this bill, the Board will become a place that fosters meaningful dialogue in a way that prioritizes the wellbeing of wildlife and wild spaces for all Vermonters.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration of this bill.