



NATIONAL SHOOTING SPORTS FOUNDATION, INC.

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JAKE MCGUIGAN
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RELATIONS/STATE AFFAIRS

April 15, 2015

Chair David L. Deen
House Committee on Fish, Wildlife and Natural Resources
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-530

Position: Oppose

Re: Opposition to H.296 Sport Shooting Ranges

Dear Chair Deen and Members of the Committee:

The National Shooting Sports Foundation ("NSSF") is the trade association for America's firearms, ammunition, hunting and recreational shooting sports industry. Its mission is to promote, protect and preserve hunting and the shooting sports. NSSF has a membership of more than 12,500 manufacturers, distributors, firearms retailers, shooting ranges, and sportsmen's organizations. Our manufacturer members make the firearms used by law-abiding Vermont sportsmen, the U.S. military and law enforcement agencies throughout the state. This is to notify you of NSSF's strong opposition to H.296.

This exhaustive bill would have a detrimental effect on hunting, shooting sports, firearms education and the funding of conservation efforts in the State of Vermont. This regulation will decrease the number of sportsmen and shooters in Vermont, which will undoubtedly lead to the loss of our hunting and firearms heritage with future generations.

Our industry is proud of its strong presence and economic impact in Vermont. But we are equally mindful of the important role sportsmen play in Vermont's economy. Sportsmen spend close to **\$295 million** each year, generating **\$34 million in taxes** and supporting over **4,400 jobs** all for Vermont. The federal excise tax sportsmen willingly pay on their ammunition and firearms supports wildlife conservation efforts in which Vermont received over **\$4.5 million** in fiscal year 2014. This conservation funding will likely increase in the coming years as more people are involved in firearms, but if strict legislation goes into place closing down shooting ranges it will most definitely produce a precipitous decrease.

Unfortunately, opportunities for Americans to safely engage in both informal recreational and competitive shooting at ranges have declined significantly in recent years. In addition to impacting the ability to participate in the shooting sports, these declines have also reduced the opportunities for hunters to sight in their rifles and shotguns before the hunting season and for firearms safety education and hunter education courses to be taught to new shooters and hunters.

We have seen the federal government trying to address lack of range opportunities by trying to open up federal funds to support the construction of ranges. Providing states with these new incentives will improve the safety of recreational shooting and assist in the recruitment and retention of a new generation of hunters and shooters. It will also result in additional purchases of firearms and ammunition; the excise taxes those sales will generate will provide increased funding for wildlife conservation and hunter education programs. H.296 will do the exact opposite of what other states and what the federal government is trying to do to increase access to ranges.

This bill seems to be the result of outcry from a few local residents who moved into the area long after the development of a specific range took place. Ranges serve the purpose of teaching firearms safety and offers training courses. NSSF has a very successful program called First Shots® which provides quality instruction that emphasizes firearm safety and gives newcomers an opportunity to give shooting a try. It is one of many NSSF programs that are advancing participation and understanding of the shooting sports. These programs would become obsolete without the wonderful range facilities throughout Vermont. Any and all shooting events, including junior shooting programs, Women on Target, Becoming an Outdoors Woman, and club field days enjoyed by thousands of responsible, licensed, firearms owners and shooting enthusiasts will be severely impacted with range closures.

We have seen a tremendous increase in the number of participants in the shooting sports and also to the ranks of lawful firearms owners. Over 50% of participants in our First Shots program are women. Many of these women attend the events so that they can have a thorough understanding of firearms and learn how to safely handle a firearm. Many of these women use this as an introduction so that they may become independent and protect themselves or their family. Losing valuable resources like ranges will strip any chance that these people have to safely learn in a controlled environment proper firearm procedures.

Data released by the National Safety Council demonstrates that unintentional firearm-related fatalities continue to remain at historically low levels. In fact, in the last two decades the number of unintentional firearm-related fatalities has declined by 58 percent – from 1,440 accidental deaths in 1987 to 600 in 2011. Firearms are involved in fewer than 1 percent of all accidental fatalities in the United States. In a side-by-side comparison with other forms of injury, firearms have the lowest rate of accidents. The reason for this is because people have proper training, safety programs and practice facilities which are all offered by ranges.

There are various safe and fun shooting activities that occur each and every day at ranges throughout Vermont. Trap, skeet, 5-stand, sporting clays, pistol competitions, and Scholastic Clay events are just a few. The general public is invited to observe and even participate in many of these events. It offers them the opportunity to see firsthand the excitement and at the same time the extremely safe nature of the shooting sports.

The end result of closing ranges would be a drastic reduction in new shooters, would create one more hurdle to enjoying this sport, and would further reduce our numbers.

For the above stated reasons, the National Shooting Sports Foundation opposes H.296 which would inevitably lead to the closure of ranges throughout Vermont. We welcome the opportunity to participate in this important, discussion and to make known our views. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Jake McGuigan
Director of State Affairs