

To: House Natural Resources and Fish and Wildlife Committee

Re: H.411 – An act relating to the retrieval and disposal of wild animals

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I am a retired Game Warden and Hunter Education Training Coordinator for the State of Vermont, serving for 33 years. Following retirement I served as the executive vice-president of the International Hunter Education Association, the Director for Orion-The Hunter's Institute and was a founding board member for the New England Chapter of the Backcountry Hunters and Anglers. The following is my opinion alone.

H.411 Wanton Waste and Retrieval is legislation that has been a long time coming. I support the goals of the bill, as do most of the sportspeople that I know and interact with in the many conservation organizations I belong to. My experience as a Game Warden and hunter education leader is that the vast majority of hunters also do everything in their power to fully utilize any animal they harvest.

However, there are those that go by the mantra that "if it's legal it's OK to do." As an officer this behavior was a source of frustration. Failure to make an effort to retrieve or killing an animal without a serious purpose clearly falls into this category. H.411 is primarily aimed at those who don't voluntarily follow these baseline hunting ethics.

This said, it is also my experience that laws that address an issue that a sizable number of folks don't think is a problem or don't understand are very difficult to detect and enforce, hard to get prosecuted and nearly impossible to convict. Such is the case in H.411 by including coyotes and to a lesser extent crows. Evidence of this lack of support is the study committee's draft that formed the basis for this bill, which specifically excluded both species. I personally don't think crows or coyotes should be shot and not utilized except in specific depredation situations. But having a part of a law that is not supported by most of Vermont's hunting organization's leadership will undermine the rest of the law and in the past has led to the defeat of similar regulations.

I would like to suggest the following change to H.411 to overcome this problem: Exclude coyotes and crows from the law for now.

A better solution concerning coyotes is for hunting and conservation organizations to work with the Fish and Wildlife Department and the Fish and Wildlife Board to get a season established for coyotes that encompasses the time of year when their fur is prime. Having a season on coyotes when the fur can be utilized will go a long way to reducing wanton waste. It is much easier for hunters to understand and follow, and is much easier to enforce and prosecute. Both crows and coyotes could be added to the retrieval law after this occurs.

I would also suggest the bill specifically state that entrails from animals legally taken can be left at the kill site. This is probably covered under the acceptable hunting practices mentioned in the bill but would clear up any ambiguity if specifically stated.

Thanks you for listening and for allowing me to testify on this important legislation.