

MWF Testimony on SB 157

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee,

My name is Ben Lamb, and I am the conservation director for state and national issues for the Montana Wildlife Federation. MWF is the state's oldest and largest hunter/angler conservation organization with approximately 7,500 members and 23 affiliated Rod and Gun Clubs. Today, we stand in support of SB 157.

SB 157 is about hunters feeding the hungry. This bill creates a donation program that will allow hunters to voluntarily support food banks, and those who rely on meat from those same banks to help receive the nutrition that they need.

This bill is personal for me. Family members and close friends have all utilized food banks at one time or another.

In fact, last season, 10 of my close friends and I hunted in the Ruby valley. We were almost exclusively hunting antlerless deer. Our goal was to fill our collective freezers. Among this group were engineers, artists, bull riders, school counselors and CPA's. We also had a friend who had just had a baby boy, and as we all know, times are tough. He worked in the building trade in Bozeman. The bust came, and he was left struggling to make ends meet. He took to the fields, with a borrowed rifle, and put two deer in his truck. The rest of the party was able to harvest many deer as well, and when it came time to leave the valley, I witnessed some memorable acts of charity. When my friend left to go home, he had four deer in his truck. That meat helped that family make it through the winter. In fact, he shared those deer with other friends who are in similar situations.

Prior to this trip, I called around to different food banks to see how they handled donations of game meat. Some of the urban food banks, like Helena's Food Share, pay for the processing of game meat, other, more rural food banks, and required hunters to pay for the processing of that same meat. At \$100 for a deer, or \$200 for an elk, that is a sizeable donation for many Montanan's. In fact, I would argue that it is a deterrent to many hunters who simply cannot afford to donate sums that great.

SB 157 provides an alternative that is wholly voluntary, and keeps the bureaucracy to a minimum. It does this without constitutional issues, and it does this by helping centralize a donation point through the licensing process. I routinely spend about \$100 per year in licenses (a great value, by the way), and having the opportunity to donate another \$5-10 on top would be welcomed. Montana fields almost 250,000 hunters each year. If 10% of those donated \$5, we would help erase hunger in Montana. That account could end up with close to \$125,000. That's 1250 deer processed for local food banks. This bill will help ensure that no child should go to bed hungry. We urge you to vote yes on SB 157.