

Meagan Forsman  
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Helena, MT 59601  
January 31, 2013

Montana State Legislature  
Senate Fish and Game Committee

Dear Committee:

This letter is in reference to Senate Bill 197, allowing minors under the age of 12 to obtain a hunting license while hunting with someone over the age of 18. I am opposed to this bill as written. It leaves much open to interpretation, enables children to potentially learn bad hunting habits, and I feel it is unsafe for hunters and wildlife alike.

As written, this bill allows any child under the age of twelve to hunt with anyone over the age of eighteen before taking a hunter's education course. Few young children are able to comprehend the vast amount of knowledge it takes to successfully hunt. It takes knowledge about firearms and ammunition in order to harvest an animal without causing undue suffering to it. It also includes knowing when a shot is safe, what areas they are able to hunt in, and what is legal to hunt in the area you are in, among many other things. This bill is potentially leaving it legal for a toddler to harvest an animal. I do not believe that a toddler or even young child is able to understand or carry out most of the knowledge it takes to hunt safely and successfully.

I am a firm believer in the necessity of learning habits and skills correctly from the beginning because I know how difficult it is for people to change habits once they have already learned something in a different manner. I have been a volunteer instructor with Hunter's Education here in Helena since I was fifteen years old. I have gone to the classes and assisted to some degree for most of my life before this. Despite the fact that I took the class at twelve and taught it for many years, I did not hunt actively until I turned 21. The reason behind this is because this was the first year I felt comfortable and confident enough to successfully and safely harvest an animal.

While I have been an instructor, I have been given the opportunity to interact with a large amount of youth in this community; some come from families where hunting plays a large role in their lives, while others have no experience in hunting whatsoever. I have found in my teaching, the children who have experience hunting or even handling firearms before the class often have picked up habits that can be dangerous. If not taught correctly from the beginning, the children often can handle firearms in an unsafe manner and may make poor decisions in the field.

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While I believe people younger than 21 are able to make the decisions necessary to hunt, I do not believe that children much younger than 12 are able to. Hunting requires a lot of knowledge that even some adults find difficult to master. As I stated previously, to pick the firearm and ammunition necessary, find the area to hunt, and the animal to shoot take knowledge that few young children have. But hunting is much more than that. Hunting requires good ethics, this involves many things including knowing the distance one is able to shoot and where to shoot the animal to kill it quickly so it does not suffer. It is also necessary to hunt safely so that you and other people in the vicinity are out of danger; this is why I support hunter's education as I do, I am a huge advocate on hunting safely.

In conclusion, I do not believe that this bill should pass as it is written due to the statements I have included: it leaves too much open to interpretation, it allows unsafe habits to potentially start, and it can be very unsafe.

I appreciate you taking the time to read this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Meagan Forsman". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Meagan Forsman