

Chairperson Craven and Members of House Judiciary Committee,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to House Bill 5436, the Rhode Island Assault Weapons Act of 2025.

I am writing to follow up on my previous emailed testimony to underscore the critical importance of the Pittman-Robertson Act (also known as the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act). Since its enactment in 1937, the Act has played a vital role in wildlife conservation across the United States by providing essential funding through an 11% excise tax on firearms, ammunition, and hunting equipment.

Below are some key reasons the Pittman-Robertson Act remains indispensable:

1. **Wildlife Conservation:** Funding for state wildlife agencies to support species protection and habitat restoration, ensuring the survival of diverse ecosystems.
2. **Habitat Restoration:** Restoration and maintenance of critical habitats to mitigate the effects of habitat loss and degradation.
3. **Wildlife Management:** Funding for research, monitoring, and ecosystem management programs to keep wildlife populations in balance.
4. **Public Access to Recreation:** Support for public hunting lands, wildlife areas, and recreational spaces, fostering outdoor activities like hunting, fishing, and wildlife observation.
5. **Economic Impact:** The Act stimulates local economies through hunting and fishing tourism and related businesses, creating jobs and fostering growth in outdoor recreation.
6. **Ethical Hunting Practices:** The excise tax revenue supports hunter safety programs and shooting range maintenance, ensuring safe, ethical practices in hunting and shooting sports.
7. **Long-Term Sustainability:** Focus on balancing wildlife populations and habitats to preserve the environment for future generations.
8. **Federal and State Collaboration:** The Act strengthens partnerships between federal and state agencies, ensuring efficient implementation of conservation programs across the country.
9. **Wildlife Research:** Funding for vital wildlife research to monitor species health, manage disease, and understand emerging threats.
10. **Endangered Species Protection:** The Act funds specific programs to recover and protect endangered species.
11. **Public Awareness:** Enhancing public understanding of the importance of conservation and the value of natural spaces.

In the fiscal year 2023, Rhode Island received **\$7,176,940** in Pittman-Robertson funding to support these essential programs. Notably, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) used a \$1.25 million grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to permanently protect 125 acres of forestland in North Kingstown—enhancing both habitat conservation and public access for outdoor recreation.

However, if the proposed AWB (Assault Weapons Ban) is passed, particularly with provisions that could restrict firearm ownership, it will directly greatly reduce the revenue from the Pittman-Robertson excise tax. This reduction would severely hinder Rhode Island's conservation efforts and the DEM's ability to manage and preserve critical habitats.

Given the concerns outlined above, I urge you to consider the potential negative consequences of such legislation on wildlife conservation in Rhode Island and vote **No** on any form of this bill. The future of our state's wildlife management and public recreational spaces depends on maintaining these vital funding sources.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your support on this important issue.

Brian C. Murtha

59 Ferris St

Pawtucket, RI 02861

(401) 864-0280