

To All Hunter Education Instructors

The officers and Board of Directors of the Virginia Hunter Education Association have voted to oppose House Bill 538. This bill removes from the Code of Virginia the requirement of 6 full time hunter education coordinators and does not give any requirements for the future except that the Department will provide oversight of the program.

For background, last year the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries reorganized from 5 regions to 4. When Officer Phil Townley retired, his position was never filled. This year as of February 1, Sergeant Jon Ober is retiring and we have concerns that the previous situation may repeat itself.

The reason given for this change in code is to clarify the law; however, it is the feeling that the change as proposed will compromise the support for our program from the Department. There is no clarification in this bill and no guidance as to what kind and what amount of support is to be provided to the Hunter Education Program.

It is our opinion that the program requires a coordinator in each of the four regions in the state as well as a state coordinator to oversee the program. Due to the fact that our program is a matter of public safety it should remain a part of the Law Enforcement Division with these positions filled by sworn officers.

We encourage all volunteers to look at this bill and if you agree with our feelings on the matter please contact your State Delegate and Senator and express your opposition to this bill.

Here are some statistical facts that may help:

Total Hunter Education Volunteers - 914

Average number of students taught each year for past 5 years - 14,582

Total Volunteer Hours for July 1, 2010 thru June 30, 2011 - 29,897

Average number of classes taught per year – 368/year in the last two fiscal years

Federal money paid to the program for our efforts in 2011 - \$456,000

It is our feeling that we all perform a very important service to the Commonwealth of Virginia and to its citizens. Hunting accidents have dropped nationally approximately 50% since hunter education became mandatory. In addition there are always talks in Richmond about the decline in hunter numbers and we have provided numerous hunting opportunities and courses for new hunters. We need the current level of support for the work we do and not a reduction of important personnel.

Again we ask for your support with this matter. You can get all needed information for contacts and status of this bill from the DGIF website.