

**SFA**

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Fiscal Agency

Lansing, Michigan 48909

(517) 373-5383

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House Bill 4019 (as reported with amendment)

Sponsor: Representative Donald Van Singel

House Committee: Tourism, Fisheries, and Wildlife

Senate Committee: Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs

Date Completed: 10-10-89

**RATIONALE**

In recent years, the State has increased its efforts to ensure that its recreational resources are available to all citizens. These efforts have taken several forms, including reduced rates for hunting and fishing licenses for certain groups. (Senior citizens may receive all hunting and fishing privileges for \$5; regular licenses and permits for the same privileges for a nonsenior citizen cost \$86.) Veterans' advocates claim that since many veterans with service-connected disabilities are on a fixed income, they cannot partake of the State's hunting and fishing resources because of high license costs. Some people have suggested that it is unfair that veterans have risked their lives to protect their State and its resources only to find hunting and fishing license costs to be prohibitive. They believe that disabled veterans deserve to receive hunting and fishing privileges at reduced rates.

**CONTENT**

The bill would amend the Hunting and Fishing License Act to allow the purchase of a senior citizen hunting or fishing license by a veteran who was determined by the Federal government to be permanently and totally disabled and entitled to veterans' benefits at the 100% rate. The licenses would not be available to veterans with a 100% disability rating due to blindness. (The Act already allows a person who is declared legally blind to be eligible for a senior citizen fishing license.) The Director of

the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) could demand proof of eligibility. Licensees would have to possess proof of eligibility when hunting or fishing, and furnish proof of eligibility upon the request of a law enforcement or conservation officer.

Under the Act, the DNR is required to determine the total number of senior citizen hunting and fishing licenses issued and fees collected in the preceding year and to determine the total fees that would have been collected if senior citizens had been required to purchase certain licenses at the full fee. The Act requires the Legislature annually to appropriate the difference from the General Fund and credit it to the Game and Fish Protection Fund. The bill would require the DNR to process licenses issued under the bill in the same manner as licenses issued to senior citizens for purposes of receiving the annual appropriations from the Legislature that are credited to the Fund.

The bill would take effect on January 1, 1990.

MCL 316.320

**SENATE COMMITTEE ACTION**

The Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs adopted an amendment to provide an effective date of January 1, 1990.

H.B. 4019 (10-10-89)

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

The bill would have an indeterminate fiscal impact, depending on the number of disabled veterans who purchased hunting and fishing licenses. If all 3,663 veterans with total service-connected disability ratings participated in the program, the estimated cost for the General Fund would be \$97,000. This estimate is based on the General Fund reimbursement formula outlined in statute (MCL 316.401), which requires the Legislature to appropriate to the Game and Fish Protection Fund the difference between the amount paid for senior citizens' hunting and fishing licenses (\$4 per hunting license and \$1 per fishing license) and the amount licensees otherwise would have paid for small game licenses (\$9.50), firearm deer licenses (\$12.50), and annual fishing licenses (\$9.50).

The revenue loss to the Game and Fish Protection Fund, if all 3,663 disabled veterans participated, would be \$199,600. This estimate is based on uncollected fees for those license benefits covered under a senior citizen license that are not reimbursed by the General Fund in the formula. These include: waterfowl licenses (\$3.50), archery deer licenses (\$12.50), bear licenses (\$14.00), fur harvester's licenses (\$15.00), and trout and salmon stamps (\$9.50).

## **ARGUMENTS**

### **Supporting Argument**

It is not fair that some segments of society can enjoy Michigan's resources while other citizens who have incurred disabilities while risking their lives to protect the State cannot enjoy its resources. Hunting and fishing reportedly are popular pastimes for many veterans. Those with service-connected disabilities, however, often are on fixed incomes and have suggested that the costs of fishing and hunting licenses impose a financial burden. The bill would correct this problem by allowing veterans with service-connected disabilities to purchase licenses at reduced rates.

**Response:** The bill would affect only veterans with total service-connected disabilities, but some have suggested that those veterans should be able to afford the full price of licenses because they receive the maximum amount of benefits. Other veterans, however, should be allowed to purchase licenses at

reduced rates since they do not receive full benefits.

### **Opposing Argument**

Although the goal of attempting to provide greater access to the State's hunting and fishing resources is an admirable one, offering excessive discounts in user fees is an ill-advised way to achieve it. The State's hunting and fishing resources are supported by a user fee-based system, which provides revenue for the Game and Fish Protection Fund. Extending discounts in those fees to select groups would deteriorate the revenue source. While the bill would require that lost revenues be made up by General Fund appropriations, it is unfair to ask the State's taxpayers to pick up increasing portions of the tab for programs that are supposed to be funded by their users. In addition, there are many groups on whose behalf an argument could be made for reduced fees, and allowing disabled veterans to purchase discounted licenses would just open the door to future demands from such groups.

Legislative Analyst: P. Affholter

Fiscal Analyst: G. Cutler

### **H8990\S4019A**

This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.