



Attn: House Committee on Judiciary
Re: House Bill 4138
Date: March 1, 2023
Position: Oppose

Honorable Members of the House Committee on Judiciary,

I write you today on behalf of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation in opposition of House Bill 4138, which, without a sufficient date of effect, could cause millions of Michiganders to be in violation of the proposed law, and would create burdensome clerical responsibilities for the Michigan State Police Department that it is likely unable to sufficiently accommodate. Additionally, this bill creates barriers to participation by prohibiting new recreational shooters from borrowing guns to target practice on public lands or on private property, and adult hunters from borrowing firearms to hunt, which threatens to have significant consequences on conservation funding in the State. I respectfully request that the members of this committee reject the passage of HB 4138.

Founded in 1989, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF) is the informed authority across outdoor issues and serves as the primary conduit for influencing public policy. Working with the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC), the Governors Sportsmen's Caucus (GSC), and the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC), CSF gives a voice to hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and trappers on Capitol Hill and throughout state capitols advocating on vital outdoor issues that are the backbone of our nation's conservation legacy.

As currently written, the language of HB 4138 would cause millions of Michiganders to be in violation if the bill were to be passed. To require that a person shall not possess a firearm in Michigan “without first having obtained a license for the firearm” is impossible if that person already possesses the firearm. This would create a significant problem for the millions of responsible constituent gun-owners of Michigan who would immediately become criminals upon the bill's effective date.

Additionally, at present, the Michigan State Police department is likely not adequately staffed to handle the dramatic increase in licensing responsibilities that HB 4138 would impose. Estimates have suggested that, as of 2020, there are 434 million firearms in circulation in the United States.¹ Although state-specific estimates are not available, the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) announced last year that the industry estimate of Modern Sporting Rifles in circulation across the country is more

¹ “NSSF Releases Most Recent Firearm Production Figures,” *National Shooting Sports Foundation*, Accessed February 22, 2023, <https://www.nssf.org/articles/nssf-releases-most-recent-firearm-production-figures/>.

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than 24.4 million.² This is an increase of more than 4.5 million since its last estimation was released in 2020, which represents a more than 20% increase in just a two-year period. Requiring the Michigan State Police to process license applications for so many firearms, which are increasing each year, places a significant burden on the department that it has not been designed to accommodate.

House Bill 4138 also creates an unnecessary barrier to participate in recreational shooting activities in that the bill only allows for unlicensed individuals to possess a firearm for target practice purposes if they are at a recognized target range. This does not contemplate the many opportunities new recreational shooters in Michigan can presently enjoy that are offered at safely constructed shooting berms on private property, or on public lands. Michigan, like every state in the nation, relies on its hunters and recreational shooters to manage the state's natural resources. In 2021 alone, sportsmen and women in Michigan generated more than \$95 million in conservation revenue derived from license sales and excise taxes on sporting-related goods, including firearms and ammunition, through the unique "user pays – public benefits" approach of the American System of Conservation Funding (ASCF).³ This funding supports the conservation efforts of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

It is widely recognized that recreational target shooters, who per-capita spend even more money on firearms and ammunition than hunters, are the financial keystone for the ASCF. According to an NSSF estimate, "80 percent of Pittman-Robertson excise tax contributions are generated by sales attributed to recreational shooting."⁴ Restricting the opportunity for new recreational shooters to only learn and practice to shoot at recognized target ranges ignores the opportunity for safe firearm instruction available on both private and public lands. Creating this unnecessary barrier thereby threatens funding to the DNR and in turn jeopardizes the continued success of conservation efforts in the state.

Finally, this bill does not allow adult hunters to possess an unlicensed firearm for the purposes of hunting, despite allowing minors to possess a firearm for that purpose. This greatly hampers the ability of adults to be recruited into hunting, as they cannot try out the sport by borrowing a firearm. Recruiting the college-aged demographic – which this bill would exclude – into hunting is particularly crucial to the continued success of conservation funding. This bill would stonewall this key age group from borrowing a firearm to give the sport a try, creating a massive barrier to participation that would be wholly detrimental to one of Michigan's most storied pastimes.

I respectfully request that this Committee reject the passage of House Bill 4138. The Michigan State Police would be required to process the millions of license applications that this bill would necessitate, which would place a significant clerical burden on that department that it is not designed to accommodate. With the State Police likely not properly staffed to process these millions of license applications, Michigan sportsmen and women that currently possess legal, unlicensed firearms, would

² "Commonly Owned: NSSF Announces over 24 Million MSRs in Circulation," *National Shooting Sports Foundation*, Accessed February 22, 2023, <https://www.nssf.org/articles/commonly-owned-nssf-announces-over-24-million-msrs-in-circulation/>.

³ "American System of Conservation Funding – Michigan," *Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation*, accessed February 22, 2023.

⁴ "NSSF Commends Congress's Passage of 'Range Bill,'" *National Shooting Sports Foundation*, Accessed February 22, 2023. <https://www.nssf.org/nssf-commends-congresss-passage->

become criminals. Finally, restricting new recreational shooters to only learn at recognized target ranges rather than on private property or public lands, and prohibiting adults from borrowing firearms to hunt, threatens to deter participation and thereby damage conservation funding in the state. I thank you for the opportunity to provide this important testimony on House Bill 4138, and I welcome any further questions that you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert A. Matthews". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and "M".

Robert Matthews

Senior Coordinator, Upper Midwestern States

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

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