



**Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 203
Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage**

April 26, 2017

Good morning. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in support of Assembly Bill 203, which would create a special wild turkey hunting program for disabled veterans.

The need for this legislation was brought to my attention by a coalition of sporting and veterans groups, who identified a concern with the special disabled veteran mentored turkey hunting events that are currently held under the DNR's successful Learn to Hunt program. Unfortunately, under the rules of Learn to Hunt, a person can only participate in one of these events once in a lifetime for each specific species. This means that once a disabled veteran takes part in a Learn to Hunt turkey hunting event, they are not eligible for the program again. Additionally, under the current rules, if a disabled veteran has hunted a given species prior to their deployment, they are not allowed to join a Learn to Hunt-style hunting event for that given species after their return.

We understand that for the traditional Learn to Hunt events, this restriction makes sense because its intent is to teach prospective hunters the skills they need to successfully hunt on their own. However, disabled veterans usually rely on the program and their mentors as a means to hunt. Participating in one hunt should not disqualify them from an activity that they enjoy so much.

Since Learn to Hunt is not defined in state statute, Assembly Bill 203 would create a separate mentored hunting program similar to the Learn to Hunt program, but specifically for disabled veterans. This program would allow disabled veterans to hunt wild turkey with a mentor during a specially designated wild turkey event, and would not disqualify any disabled veterans from participation if they have already hunted turkey before. The event would take place during the two weeks immediately preceding each wild turkey hunting season.

Assembly Bill 203 would also require the DNR to provide instruction to disabled veterans in the form of a mentor, who would accompany the disabled veteran at all times during the hunt. The mentor would be required to have at least five years of hunting experience, to hold valid hunting approval, and be capable of providing instruction and assistance to the disabled veteran. To be consistent with other DNR programs, Assembly Bill 203 defines a disabled veteran as any veteran who is a Wisconsin resident who has a service-connected disability rating under federal law of at least 50%.

Assembly Bill 203 will create a successful and popular program that will not place undue limitations on the disabled veterans who participate in this event. It's important to note that in 2015, the Conservation Congress supported a resolution regarding this proposal at the Spring Hearing. I ask you to join them in supporting Assembly Bill 203 to provide Wisconsin's disabled veterans with a fun and safe way to enjoy the outdoors and exercise their right to hunt. Thank you.



TERRY MOULTON



WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

23RD SENATE DISTRICT

From: Senator Terry Moulton

To: Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage

Re: **Testimony on Assembly Bill 203**
Relating to: requiring the Department of Natural Resources to establish a special wild turkey hunting program for certain disabled veterans, providing an exemption from emergency rule procedures, and requiring the exercise of rule-making authority.

Date: April 26, 2017

Mr. Chairman and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to you today. We've successfully brought back the wild turkey in Wisconsin and now we have a renewed interest in hunting them. The Department of Natural Resources has many programs to give people an opportunity to hunt including the Learn to Hunt (LTH) program where a mentor takes a novice or disabled hunter out in the woods and helps them hunt for a trophy or maybe some meat for the freezer.

Unfortunately, an issue was brought to my attention by disabled veterans who want to hunt with assistance similar to the Learn to Hunt Program. For disabled veterans, it can be hard to go out into the woods alone, so having a mentor there can be helpful. However, disabled veterans are only allowed to participate in the Learn to Hunt program one time. There is no other program that caters to the needs of disabled veterans hunters, either. Assembly Bill 203 will ensure that disabled veterans get as many opportunities as they can to hunt for wild turkey during specially designated turkey hunting events.

Specifically, this bill will require that the DNR establish a program for disabled veterans to hunt wild turkeys with a mentor. There will also be no maximum cap for how many times they want to be in the program and hunt during specially designated turkey hunting events. The mentors are required to have five years of hunting experience to provide assistance and instruction to the disabled veteran.

For veterans, it can be difficult adjusting to civilian life again. Hunting provides a peaceful activity that gives them the opportunity to be outdoors and possibly bring home some food for their families. Disabled veterans might need a little extra assistance, which the Learn to Hunt program provides in the form of an experienced mentor who will hunt with them. However, the limitations of that program do not help disabled veterans who would like to hunt more than once.

I would ask you to please recommend the passage of Assembly Bill 203 to help provide disabled veterans with these additional hunting opportunities. Thank you again for allowing me to submit testimony today.

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