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## ELIMINATE MINIMUM AGE REQUIREMENT FOR ALL-SPECIES AND AQUATIC SPECIES FISHING LICENSES

House Bill 4937 with committee  
amendments  
First Analysis (10-16-01)

Sponsor: Rep. Sue Tabor  
Committee: Conservation and Outdoor  
Recreation

### ***THE APPARENT PROBLEM:***

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) operates the state's hunting and fishing programs under the user-pay concept. The primary source of funding for these programs is the Game and Fish Protection Fund, which is administered by the department. Almost 90 percent of the fund's revenues, which totaled approximately \$41.5 million for the past fiscal year, come from the sale of game and fish licenses, with the remainder coming from a variety of sources, such as interest and earnings from the fund, settlement fees, federal indirect earnings, and reimbursement for liquidated damages. Together with appropriate federal funds, the fund provides the DNR's entire budget for its Fisheries and Wildlife Divisions, and most of the budget for the Law Enforcement Division.

At present, under Part 435 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, which regulates hunting and fishing licensing, a person 12 years of age or older must possess a license to fish in "state waters over which the state has jurisdiction." The cost of licenses varies. For example, the fee for an all species fishing license, a license to take all fish, including trout and salmon, costs \$28.00 for residents and \$42.00 for non-residents. On the other hand, a resident or non-resident aged 12 to 16 years of age may purchase a Junior All Species Volunteer license (so called because, under the act, a person under 17 years of age *may*, but is not *required* to, have a fishing license) for a fee of \$2.00. Since 1996, under the provisions of Public Act 585, children under 12 years of age are not included in the provision to allow purchase of a volunteer all-species license.

Some parents question the logic of this latter provision. In testimony before the House Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Committee, one such parent argued that purchasing a fishing

license would instill pride in a child, as well as providing the incentive to save toward a meaningful goal. Consequently, legislation has been introduced to apply the all species fishing license provision to children under age 12.

### ***THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:***

Currently, Part 435 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, which regulates hunting and fishing licensing, specifies that a person 12 to 16 years of age may obtain an all species fishing license (a license to take all fish, including trout and salmon). House Bill 4937 would amend the act to delete the minimum age requirement. Consequently, under the bill, all persons under 17 years of age would be allowed to purchase the license at the fee of \$2.00.

The bill would also amend the current provision that allows youth from 12 to 17 years of age to take aquatic species (frogs, turtles, etc.) without a license. The bill would specify, instead, that any person under 17 years of age could take aquatic species without a license.

MCL 324.43532

### ***BACKGROUND INFORMATION:***

When faced with the necessity of increasing Game and Fish Protection Fund revenues in 1996, the DNR confronted a dilemma: Michigan's population was aging, and a smaller percentage of revenues from hunting and fishing licenses would be received from young people. As noted in the governor's *Hunting and Fishing Heritage Task Force Recommendations*, submitted by the Hunting and Fishing Heritage Task

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Force in January, 1996, between 1980 and 1990 the number of state residents aged 10 to 18 declined by nearly 21 percent, and the number of young people aged 18 to 24 dropped by 20 percent. The senior population, on the other hand, had increased: some statistics suggested that the percentage of the Michigan population age 65 and over increased by more than 40 percent between 1970 and 1990, while total population figures remained stable. In addition, demographic studies suggested that this segment of the population was the only one whose discretionary income had increased in the last decade. The incomes of senior citizens may be fixed, but usually they do not have the annual expenses, such as mortgage payments and college tuition, that younger families incur.

The topic of encouraging young people's respect for the state's outdoor, hunting, and fishing heritage was also addressed in the governor's 1996 *Task Force Recommendations*. Noting a societal trend toward declining participation in hunting and fishing activities, due to a general aging of the citizenry, the task force made several recommendations. Included among these were the establishment of education programs that could be utilized by schools, clubs, and other groups; the promotion of partnerships with groups such as 4-H and MUCC in Michigan and nationally; and a proposal to increase accessibility to hunting and fishing. With regard to this last proposal, the task force specifically recommended that the DNR should retain the current age for fishing licenses. Under the provisions of Public Act 585 of 1996, however, the age was lowered, from 17 to 12 years of age, and a new license category -- the junior all species volunteer fishing license, with a \$2.00 fee -- was established for children 12 to 16 years of age.

### **FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The House Fiscal Agency (HFA) reports that, although the bill could ultimately increase the number of fishers in the state, it currently would have no fiscal impact. (1010-01)

### **ARGUMENTS:**

#### **For:**

Collecting the license fee for children under 12 years of age under the bill would not only provide children with an incentive to save, in order to participate in the sport, it would also provide greater consistency between hunting and fishing license provisions, and enable the Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) to obtain data on young anglers. Studies conducted

during the past decade have indicated that more young people are abandoning the sport of fishing, and possibly other outdoor activities. For example, the DNR operates a *Young Angler Program* for youth ages 12 to 16, under which a Junior Voluntary All Species license (good for all species) may be purchased for the regular fee of \$2.00. The program's avowed goal is to get youth ages 12 to 16 excited about angling and to teach them about the state's fishing heritage. Young people who register receive a special patch with their license. According to DNR statistics, 2,400 young people joined the program in 1997, its first year of operation. In 2000, however, approximately 1,000 children registered. Therefore, instituting the \$2 junior fishing license will not make money, since a \$2 license fee produces no profit for the department. It will, however, allow the DNR to use junior fishing licenses to develop a database for marketing the sport of fishing to youngsters.

#### **Response:**

The bill is unnecessary. While it is true that registration in the DNR's *Young Angler Program* has dropped, the DNR operates other programs that have had greater success in capturing the attention of young anglers. Under one of these programs, *Fishing in the Parks*, citizens are invited to spend a free evening at a Michigan State Park, where experienced instructors introduce participants to the sport of fishing with step-by-step directions. The 20- to 30-minute lesson teaches fishing basics, such as knot-tying, setting up your pole, casting, selecting and using bait, and removing fish from the hook. The program is targeted toward those who have some angling experience, or those who have never picked up a pole.

In addition to the *Fishing in the Parks Program*, the department reports that its most successful program for youngsters is its Outdoor Explorers' Club, which is targeted especially to same "11 and under" age group targeted under the bill. Under the program, club members receive the Outdoor Explorers Club newsletter, which is published three times a year, and features outdoor activities and adventures. It also has riddles, games, eye-catching graphics, the cartoon characters Sandy Dunes and Forrest Trails, and often contains surprises, such as the unique use of a special, pine-scented, ink in the Winter 2000 issue, which highlighted the Hartwick Pines State Park and Michigan's colorful logging past. In each issue, according to the department, the aim is to provide a fun, whimsical, learning experience that appeals to children and adults. The department reports that the newsletter has proven to be an effective way to communicate concepts, attitudes, and behaviors that

lead youngsters to appreciate and become active participants in the state's natural resources. The department also maintains that incorporating this approach into some of its conservation education plans has made its programs more effective in involving youngsters and families with the outdoors, and especially with the state parks system. (Children can sign up for these programs on the DNR web site at [www.michigandnr.com](http://www.michigandnr.com), or by mail.)

***POSITIONS:***

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) does not oppose the bill. (10-11-01)

The Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) has no position on the bill. (10-15-01)

Analyst: R. Young.

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.