

NATIONAL DEER ASSOCIATION

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24 August, 2021

Mark C. Poloncarz
County Executive
Edward A. Rath County Office Building
95 Franklin Street
Buffalo, New York 14202

RE: Youth Deer Hunting Pilot Program - Environmental Conservation Law Section 11-0935 (ECL 11-0935)

Dear Mr. Poloncarz,

On behalf of the National Deer Association (NDA), I'm writing to ask for Erie County's opt-in election for the recently passed youth deer hunting pilot program. We are a national non-profit conservation organization dedicated to ensuring the future of wild deer, wildlife habitat and hunting. We represent 30,000 members nationwide, and our membership includes hunters, landowners and natural resource professionals.

Recently, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed the budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021-22 into law. Included in this legislation, Environmental Conservation Law Section 11-0935 (ECL 11-0935), is a deer hunting pilot program that would allow a hunting license holder who is 12 or 13 years of age to hunt deer with a crossbow, rifle, shotgun or muzzleloader if certain conditions are met. Currently, New York has the most restrictive hunting age requirements in the country, and this initiative would provide a push in the right direction. Most states allow hunters at least 12 years of age to hunt big game with the supervision of a parent, guardian, or mentor. Engaging youth in big game hunting at a young age and with appropriate supervision goes a long way in developing life-long hunters and conservationists. Further, there is no data to suggest that doing so is unsafe.

To participate in the program, a youth hunter must be accompanied by a parent, legal guardian or designated mentor who is at least 21 years of age, has had at least three years' experience in hunting deer and who holds a hunting license. The parent, guardian or mentor must maintain physical control over the youth hunter at all times while hunting, and both the parent, guardian or mentor and the youth hunter must remain at ground level at all times. Second, both individuals must display either a minimum of 250 square inches of fluorescent orange or pink worn above the waist and visible from all directions, or a solid fluorescent hat or cap visible from all directions.

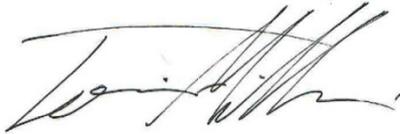
Additionally, the deer hunting pilot program will only take effect in eligible areas. Eligible areas will include counties that pass a local law authorizing participation in the pilot program and have notified the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) of such participation. Erie County is an eligible county, and in fact, remains one of only two eligible counties that have not passed a local law authorizing participation in the program.

The New York Department of Environment Conservation (DEC) Division of Wildlife of Fish and Wildlife has already reached out to all eligible counties to provide guidance on opting-in to the program. Additionally, DEC will provide draft language for the county to meet the necessary legal requirements for participation if needed. To notify DEC of the county's local law opting into this program, or if you

have any questions or need any assistance regarding this new pilot, please contact the DEC Division of Fish and Wildlife at wildlife@dec.ny.gov or 518-402-8883. There is no deadline for opting-in, and DEC will maintain a rolling list of counties that do so.

Again, we urge Erie County to opt-in to the youth deer hunting pilot program. New York's youths are missing out on hunting opportunities and outdoor experiences that youths in every other state get to experience. Youth hunting opportunities, especially with the appropriate provisions listed ECL 11-0935, are safe and enjoyable for all, and engaging youth in big game hunting at a young age and with appropriate supervision goes a long way in developing life-long hunters and conservationists.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Torin Miller', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Torin Miller
Director of Policy