

Dear Secretary Cardona:

We, the undersigned hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation organizations write to you on behalf of the millions of American outdoorsmen and women, industry professionals, and archery and hunter education instructors we represent. It recently came to our attention that the Department of Education will no longer permit Elementary and Secondary Education Act grants to be used for hunter safety, archery education or wilderness education programs.

According to communications from Department of Education staff, section 13401 of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (ESEA) made amendments to section 8526 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to prohibit funds to provide any person with a dangerous weapon, as defined in section 930(g)(2) of title 18, or training in the use of a dangerous weapon. The Department of Education staff believe the amendments preclude the use of ESEA funding for programs including hunter education and archery in the school.

Your department's strict, and we believe incorrect, reading of the text and prohibition of funds for hunter education, archery and wilderness education runs counter to the legislative intent of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. The amendments to the ESEA were intended to prohibit the use of these funds to pay for arming and training of teachers, not ending decades worth of safety training of millions of students, which provided them mental health benefits. Your prohibition not only ignores the legislative intent, but it threatens to undermine the value of these longstanding enrichment programs.

Encouraging children and adolescents to take part in outdoor recreation improves mental health. A [March 24, 2021 article](#) by Andrew Avitt of the U.S. Forest Service outlined many of the benefits of outdoor recreation such as physical wellness, mental wellness, and wellness in the community. The same article quoted Michelle Kondo, a research social scientist with the USDA Forest Service's Northern Research station who wrote "The physiological response to being outside in nature is real, and it's measurable. There are many physical and psychological benefits of nature that scientists have observed, which can better help us understand how nature supports wellness in the body, mind and community." We would respectfully ask that you reconsider your interpretation of the amended statute and reinstate the eligibility of hunter safety, archery education and wilderness programs.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

American Woodcock Society
Archery Trade Association
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Boone and Crockett Club
California Waterfowl Association
Camp Fire Club of America
Catch-A-Dream Foundation
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports
Dallas Safari Club
Delta Waterfowl

Ducks Unlimited
Houston Safari Club
Izaak Walton League of America
Masters of Foxhounds Association
Mule Deer Foundation
National Bobwhite & Grassland Initiative
National Deer Association
National Rifle Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Wild Turkey Federation
Orion: The Hunter's Institute
Pheasants Forever
Pope & Young Club
Professional Outfitters and Guides of America
Quail Forever
North American Grouse Partnership
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ruffed Grouse Society
Safari Club International
Sportsmen's Alliance
Texas Wildlife Association
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Tread Lightly!
Whitetails Unlimited
Wild Sheep Foundation
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi