

# Legislative Analysis



## FREE HUNTING & FISHING LICENSES FOR DISABLED VETERANS

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House Bill 5292 as reported without amendment

Sponsor: Rep. Holly Hughes

Committee: Natural Resources, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation

### First Analysis (4-17-12)

**BRIEF SUMMARY:** The bill would allow a permanently and totally disabled veteran to obtain any resident hunting or fishing license free of charge.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** House Bill 5292 would have an indeterminate fiscal impact on the Department of Natural Resources. The bill's provisions would reduce the amount of revenue deposited into the Game and Fish Protection Fund and its subfunds by an unknown amount. See below for a detailed fiscal analysis.

### **THE APPARENT PROBLEM:**

According to committee testimony, Michigan could stand to improve the delivery of services to veterans, many of whom face significant economic difficulties when they return to civilian life. For example, the unemployment rate is significantly higher among veterans than the rest of the population. Currently, a disabled veteran is able to purchase a senior small game, senior firearm deer, senior bow and arrow deer, senior wild turkey, senior fur harvester, and a restricted or all-species fishing license at a discounted senior rate of 60% less than a resident license. Many feel providing resident hunting and fishing licenses to disabled veterans at no charge is a gesture of gratitude for all that veterans have sacrificed on behalf of the people of Michigan.

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

The bill would amend Section 43537 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to allow a disabled veteran to obtain any resident hunting or fishing license free of charge.

Currently, a disabled veteran is able to purchase a senior small game, senior firearm deer, senior bow and arrow deer, senior wild turkey, senior fur harvester, and a restricted or all-species fishing license at a discounted senior rate of 60% less than a resident license.

The bill would also remove a section, enacted as 2007 PA 60, that established a 2007 pilot program allowing disabled veterans who are Michigan residents to hunt during youth firearm deer hunting days in certain counties. Additionally, the bill would remove a provision allowing the department to require proof of blindness for a resident who is legally blind and is seeking to purchase a senior restricted or all-species fishing license.

The individual would no longer have to possess proof of blindness when fishing or provide the proof upon the request of a peace officer.

As used in Section 43537, "*disabled veteran*" means a resident who has been determined by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to be permanently and totally disabled as a result of military service and entitled to veterans' benefits at the 100% rate, for a disability other than blindness, or a resident rated by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs as individually unemployable.

MCL 324.43537

***FISCAL INFORMATION:***

House Bill 5292 would have an indeterminate fiscal impact on the Department of Natural Resources. The bill's provisions would reduce the amount of revenue deposited into the Game and Fish Protection Fund and its subfunds by an unknown amount.

Under current law, disabled veterans are eligible to purchase senior hunting and fishing licenses at the same 60 per cent discount as senior citizens. Revenues from hunting and fishing licenses must be deposited into the Game and Fish Protection Fund and its subfunds. In FY 2009-10, the Fund received \$45.3 million from hunting and fishing license fees.

The Fund is intended to support statewide hunting and fishing programs. Funding may be expended for the development, operation and maintenance of wildlife and fisheries programs and facilities, acquisition of land, research, law enforcement, and the protection and control of wildlife and fish.

By allowing disabled veterans to obtain licenses free of charge instead of purchasing licenses at a 60 per cent discount, the bill would reduce the amount of revenue to the Game and Fish Protection Fund and its subfunds by an unknown amount. The amount of revenue reduction would depend upon the number of disabled veterans that would obtain free licenses under the provisions of the bill. According to the 2010 U.S. Census data, there were approximately 16,100 veterans living in Michigan classified as seventy percent disabled or higher.

Under current law, eligible disabled veterans may purchase senior hunting licenses at the senior discounted rate. However, House Bill 5292 would allow an eligible disabled veteran to obtain any license listed under Part 435 of NREPA free of charge. Thus, these veterans would be eligible to obtain other hunting licenses - in addition to those offered for seniors - at no cost. This would include licenses such as waterfowl licenses and moose and elk licenses (if the veteran should be chosen in the lottery process).

P.A. 451 of 1994 (NREPA, MCL 324.43546) provides that the DNR must determine the amount of revenue that was lost through the sale of senior hunting and fishing licenses and that the Legislature shall appropriate an equal amount of General Fund dollars to the

Game and Fish Protection Fund to replace that lost revenue. According to the Department, this General Fund appropriation has not been made in recent years. If the Legislature made this appropriation, then the bill's provisions would reduce the General Fund by an indeterminate amount. If not, the revenue reduction would remain in the Game and Fish Protection Fund.

***ARGUMENTS:***

***For:***

Veterans have sacrificed a great deal protect the lives of others. Supporters feel this bill would be a meaningful show of thanks for that sacrifice. Additionally, testimony indicated license sales could increase as a disabled veteran would likely be accompanied by other individuals who would need hunting and/or fishing licenses.

***Against:***

There was concern over the amount of money that could be lost from the federal government. At this time the Department of Natural Resources has not taken a position on the bill.

***POSITIONS:***

Michigan Association of Counties supports the bill. (1-31-12)

A representative of Disabled American Veterans testified in support of the bill. (3-27-12)

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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.