



March 27, 2019

Assemblyman Reginald Jones-Sawyer
Chairman
Assembly Public Safety Committee
1020 N Street, Room 111
Sacramento CA 95814

Re: AB 18 (Levine) Excise Tax on Firearms – OPPOSE

Dear Chairman Jones-Sawyer:

California Waterfowl regrets to oppose AB 18 (Levine), as amended March 21. The bill imposes an excise tax of \$25 on the storage, use, or other consumption of a firearm purchased new from a retailer. Revenues from the taxes would be deposited in a California Violence Intervention and Prevention Grant Program.

As an organization, California Waterfowl abhors gun violence. California Waterfowl believes that proper and competent enforcement of existing laws should be sufficient to prevent gun violence. California Waterfowl opposed SB 620 in 2017 that made previously mandatory enhancements for using firearms in the commission of crimes discretionary.

California Waterfowl works to restore wetlands, and to maximize the food and habitat value of restored and existing wetlands for both migratory and local breeding populations of waterfowl. California Waterfowl believes that hunters are the driving force for wetland conservation. CWA works to ensure that Californians have adequate access to hunting lands, and that regulations and laws don't stifle responsible, ethical hunting.

Hunters pay a wide variety of fees and charges at the state and federal level for the privilege of hunting game, including waterfowl. These fees and charges include fees to take hunter safety qualification tests, hunting license fees, state and federal duck stamp fees to fund conservation, fees for passes to enter onto state wildlife areas and federal wildlife refuges, and state and local sales taxes on hunting supplies, including firearms and ammunition.

Also, hunters pay a Pittman- Robertson tax of 11 percent on firearms and ammunition to fund conservation of wildlife habitat. Purchasers of firearms are charged a fee to take a test on firearms safety before purchasing a firearm. Purchasers also pay a fee for a mandatory background check before a retailer may deliver a firearm. Proposition 63 requires retailers to take additional steps to handle ammunition sales and hunters to pay a fee for a background check before purchasing ammunition.


In addition to all these mandatory charges, hunters tend to be generous in their donations to organizations such as California Waterfowl that restore and maintain wildlife habitat. However, their capacity to pay ever-increasing costs is not unlimited. An additional tax will tend to discourage hunters and will lead to diminishing revenues for the conservation of wildlife habitat.

The Fish and Game Restoration Fund is the main source of funding for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. The Fund has been declining in recent years as hunting and fishing license sales have declined. The Fund supports not only the department's programs for fish and game, but also department obligations to protect endangered and other listed species. The department is currently seeking a way to augment and rebalance the Fund without having to rely so heavily on license fees. The department is also seeking to recruit, retain, and reactivate hunters. California Waterfowl actively supports the department in these efforts.

AB 18 would impose yet another cost on hunters and other legal firearms owners that could impact existing fees and charges, which are the primary source of funding for most wildlife conservation. There is no evidence that hunters or other legal users of firearms have any part in criminal gun violence. The proper and competent enforcement of existing laws, including the disarming of the 10,000 plus individuals on the Department of Justice's Armed Prohibited Persons list who have not yet been disarmed, and the restoration of mandatory sentences for the use of firearms in crimes would have a far greater effect on gun violence than would piling on with an additional tax on gun purchases by hunters and other legal firearms owners and users.

California Waterfowl urges your "No" vote on this bill. If you would like further information about California Waterfowl and its conservation programs, please contact Jeffrey Volberg at (916) 217-5117 or jvolberg@calwaterfowl.org or Mark Hennelly at (916) 648-1406 or mhennelly@calwaterfowl.org.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Volberg
Director of Water Law & Policy

