



April 15, 2020

The Honorable Richard Pan, Chair  
Senate Health Committee  
State Capitol, Room 2191  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: SB 955 (Portantino) – OPPOSE**

Dear Senator Pan:

The California Waterfowl Association (CWA) respectfully requests that you oppose SB 955 (Portantino), which would put various licensing, fee, operation and other requirements on recreational camps.

This bill, while well intended, is a solution largely in search of a problem. While there will always be some isolated incidents, recreational camps—especially those administered by nonprofit conservation groups—operate very safely overall. Very few accidents occur on an annual basis, and those that do happen are typically not serious. Every reasonable effort is taken to ensure the safety and well-being of the youth who attend these camps.

CWA offers a number of youth camps at a variety of locations across California. We charge camp participants at the lowest rate possible to ensure that middle and lower income families can afford them. We also rely heavily on the assistance of trained volunteers. All staff and volunteers undergo background checks. We provide handbooks which describe detailed food, medical treatment, disclosures and agenda information. Many other steps are taken to ensure participants' health and safety.

One of the goals of our camps is to teach participants about the value of hunting and its associated wildlife conservation benefits. This includes classes in hunter education and safety. Staff instructors have taken and passed their hunter safety test and their National Rifle Association Instructor certification. However, not all volunteer instructors, including professional shotgun shooters, have done so as SB 955 would mandate. Please note that we

have never had a firearms-related injury in the many years that we have been operating our facilities.

Simply put, SB 955 creates far too many new requirements, paperwork and costs for small nonprofits to comply with. Requiring each camp to obtain a license and pay a fee from a local agency would create significantly more work and expense. Requiring each camp to employ both a camp director and a health director, subject to specific requirements, would similarly increase costs. These costs would then necessarily be passed onto the participants, many of whom are already struggling to afford the camp experience, or have to be absorbed by the nonprofit—which typically operates on a very limited budget.

In addition to authorizing a local agency to shut a camp down for a variety of reasons, please note that the bill requires the State Public Health Officer and State Fire Marshall to adopt additional rules and regulations governing the operation of recreational camps.

Requiring that all buildings meet additional construction standards (as SB 955 would do), would also significantly increase costs, discourage new camps from opening and shut down some current camps at least temporarily. One of the bill's provisions for overnight camps even mandates that a ventilation system capable of providing negative pressure be provided. This is unreasonable, to say the least.

SB 955 also goes so far as to mandate a certain ratio of camp counselors vs. students of a certain age cohort; this provision is arbitrary and would furthermore increase costs.

While some of the requirements in the bill are reasonable when considered individually, cumulatively they would create significant red tape and costs for our youth camps to continue to operate. The practical effect is that they would serve as a major disincentive for nonprofits to continue to offer recreational camps for youth. In fact, some nonprofits would cease hosting camps altogether.

For these reasons, please oppose this bill when it is considered by your committee.

Sincerely,



Mark Hennelly, Vice President of Legislative Affairs and Public Policy  
California Waterfowl Association

cc: Members, Senate Health Committee  
The Honorable Anthony Portantino, Senator, 25<sup>th</sup> District