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RURAL RESOURCES

August 28, 2024

Sean Mahar
Interim Commissioner, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
625 Broadway
Albany, NY 12233-1010

Dear Interim Commissioner Mahar,

I am writing to you regarding concerns that my constituents have raised following the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) transition to plain paper sporting licenses and tags.

The transition to plain paper and the rules governing the purchase of hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses have raised accessibility concerns for many of my constituents. For example, the requirement that individuals provide a valid email address to purchase licenses and tags has caused issues for individuals who do not use email or those with limited access to technology. Efforts to transition to electronic licenses and the use of the DEC smartphone application raise similar concerns.

In addition, while the tags previously provided by the DEC were durable and waterproof, plain paper tags are easily degraded by moisture and can be easily torn or otherwise damaged. In response, DEC has stated that it is the responsibility of license and tag holders to protect their documents from the elements. This not only places an additional burden on hunters and trappers but contradicts DEC's stated goal of reducing carbon emissions by encouraging an increase in the use of zip-lock bags and other plastics to maintain the integrity of paper tags.

The ability to print licenses and tags at home also raises concerns about potential fraud, as there is no limit on the number of copies which an individual can print and no unique markings to differentiate copies. While the majority of hunters, fishers, and trappers are ethical and law-abiding, I have already heard from constituents who are aware of individuals exploiting the new system. This not only deprives the state of revenue but also undermines the system of conservation and wildlife management that sporting licenses and tags are meant to protect.

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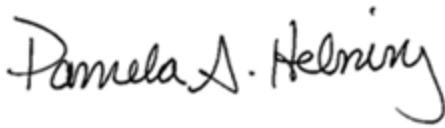


Finally, the transition to paper licenses has placed an increased burden on licensing agents, including local governments, who must now print licenses and tags for hunters, fishers, and trappers who do not have the means to print them at home. Current regulations require that these agents do so at no charge, meaning that local governments are forced to use resources and money from their own budgets to facilitate the purchase of DEC sporting tags and licenses.

Hunting, fishing, and trapping are a way of life for many New Yorkers, especially in the rural areas which I represent. I ask that you take steps to address these concerns and ensure that this way of life is protected and accessible for all New Yorkers. Furthermore, I ask that you take steps to reduce the burden that new regulations have placed on licensing agents, including local governments.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Warmest Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pamela A. Helming". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name.

Pamela A. Helming
54th Senate District