



North Dakota Senate

STATE CAPITOL
600 EAST BOULEVARD
BISMARCK, ND 58505-0360



Senator Justin Gerhardt

District 34
500 Ninth Avenue NW
Mandan, ND, 58554-2546
jgerhardt@ndlegis.gov

COMMITTEES:

Education
Energy and Natural Resources

3/7/25

Good morning, Chairman Porter and members of the committee. For the record, Senator Justin Gerhardt serving District 34 in Mandan.

Today you have before you SB 2309. It's good to be here and I'm very excited to present this bill and ask that you give it a do pass so that we can increase the opportunities for youth to have successful and enjoyable hunting experiences in our great state.

SB 2309 is quite simple. Currently, youth ages 11, 12 & 13 in our state are entitled to a statewide antlerless whitetail deer tag. The intent of SB 2309 is to allow for the deer tag, or permit, to also include mule deer.

I've had wonderful opportunities to take three of my 4 kids out hunting for their first deer with the youth whitetail doe tag. We've made great memories and it's set that foundation for their continued interest in hunting. But throughout the past number of years, conversations with other friends of mine have often led to the question, "why whitetail only?" It even led me to call the game and fish department years ago and ask that very question, where the simple answer I was told was that only the legislature could make that sort of change. Looking back, I should have taken that further and contacted one of my legislators, but I didn't. You see, at that time, there were plenty of whitetail in the area, and making a legislative change seemed like something way out of anything I'd ever be able to accomplish. But here we are, years later, and a couple things have changed. The major change is Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) which most of us refer to as Blue Tongue, has taken a major major toll on the whitetail population in our area, and by area, I don't think it's incorrect to say, across thousands of square miles.

Four seasons ago, when I took my son on his first hunt, was right about the time EHD swept through the area southwest of Mandan where we typically hunt. He and I made it out one day that season and instead of coming home with a harvest, we came home with covid and crashed on the couch for the next week or two. In the next two hunting seasons we were unable to find an opportunity for him to make his first harvest. We traveled a hundred miles, one way, the opposite direction from where we typically hunt, to try to find some plots land and an opportunity to bag his first deer, but with no success.

Now where we typically hunt, the mule deer have appeared to increase in numbers and increased their territory, I'd assume as they don't have to compete with the white tail that were

once there. We do come across a whitetail now and again, but most hunters are hesitant to shoot them, as we'd like to see their numbers recover.

So, with that, this bill, SB 2309 would give the game and fish department the ability to allow for any antlerless youth tags. It would also allow them to restrict those tags from being filled in units where they might be trying to protect the mule deer population. This was intended to mimic how the 14/15 year old "any" tag currently works, where the game and fish has a restricted tag for certain badlands units so as to best manage the herd in that area.

On a final note, my son was able to make his first deer harvest this past season. He shot a really nice mule buck that rivals some of the best of his mine. I've got pictures I'll proudly share.

Thank you Chairman Porter and committee members. I ask that you give SB 2309 a Do Pass. If you do have any questions for me, I'd be happy to try to answer them.