

Date of Hearing: June 16, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

SB 1021 (Choi) – As Amended May 18, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 35-4

SUBJECT: Fishing and hunting: youth program

SUMMARY: Requires the Fish and Game Commission (Commission) to establish a program to increase opportunities to hunt and fish for resident youth with life-threatening illnesses.

Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the Commission to establish a program to increase opportunities to fish, and to hunt big game, wild pigs, upland game birds, and migratory game birds, for resident youth with life-threatening illnesses, on or before January 1, 2028.
- 2) Requires the Commission, as it develops the program, to conduct a public process to consult with the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), interested nonprofit organizations that have goals and objectives directly related to the management and conservation of fish and wildlife and primarily represent the interests of licensed hunters and fishers, and any other interested parties.
- 3) States that the program must do the following:
 - a) Include any hunter education requirements.
 - b) Require CDFW to take any potential allocation of an animal or animals to the program into consideration when determining the number of opportunities to be made available to the hunting community to take species with limited populations where tags are available by lottery or auction only.
 - c) Require the director of CDFW to notify the Commission of any program activities at Commission meetings.
 - d) Consider the establishment of special hunts for the program within the general season for the species.
- 4) Requires the Commission to provide reasonable accommodations for participants in accordance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act [42 U.S. Code (USC) § 12101 *et seq.*], Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (29 USC § 794), and any applicable state disability laws.
 - a) Requires that the accommodations provided include authorization for a qualified assistant to accompany the youth for the purposes of tracking, retrieving, and dispatching game or fish.
 - b) Authorizes the Commission to adopt additional reasonable accommodations consistent with safe, ethical, and science-based wildlife management practices, including modified equipment or access provisions where appropriate.

- c) Requires the Commission to adopt rules and regulations as necessary to implement these accommodations.
- 5) Provides that nothing in this bill precludes the Commission from granting reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities in accordance with federal and state law or limits the Commission's existing authority to adopt regulations implementing the program.
- 6) Requires CDFW to submit a report to the Legislature on or before January 1, 2032, which must include:
 - a) The number and types of opportunities provided to youth with life-threatening illnesses pursuant to the program and the number of youth who participated in those opportunities;
 - b) The date or dates of each opportunity and any participating nonprofit organization that assisted with the opportunity;
 - c) Recommendations, if any, to improve the program, which CDFW may solicit from stakeholders and the public; and
 - d) All CDFW and Commission costs for developing and implementing the program, and revenues, if any, associated with the program.
- 7) Defines terms for the purpose of this bill:
 - a) "Life-threatening illness" as an illness that can lead to a possibility of a termination of life within five years or less as stated in writing by the patient's attending physician or surgeon.
 - b) "Youth" as an individual younger than 18 years of age.
- 8) Provides that the implementation of this bill is contingent upon an appropriation for its purposes by the Legislature in the annual Budget Act or another act.
- 9) Sunsets the program on January 1, 2033.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes CDFW to manage California's diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment of the public [Fish and Game Code (FGC) § 712.1].
- 2) Establishes the Commission for the protection of fish and game, including the power to regulate the taking or possession of birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, and reptiles (California Constitution, Article IV, Section 20; FGC § 200).
- 3) Requires every person engaged in taking any bird, mammal, fish, amphibian, or reptile to have in their immediate possession any required license, tag, stamp, or permit (FGC § 1054.2).

- 4) Authorizes the Commission to set the terms and conditions under which any permit, license, tag, reservation application, or other entitlement shall be issued under the FGC (FGC § 1050).
- 5) Prohibits the issuance of a hunting license to any person unless that person presents evidence of completion of a course in hunter education or current or past possession of a hunting license (FGC § 3050).
- 6) Requires CDFW to issue a reduced fee hunting license to a disabled veteran or recovering servicemember who has not been convicted of a violation of the FGC (FGC § 3033).
- 7) Requires CDFW to issue a reduced fee sport fishing license to a disabled veteran or recovering servicemember who has not been convicted of a violation of the FGC (FGC § 7150).
- 8) Requires CDFW to issue a hunting permit to any member of the armed forces of the United States who is in a military medical facility and who is at least 70% disabled in lieu of a hunting license and appropriate tags (FGC § 3038).
- 9) Requires CDFW to issue a free sport fishing license to any person who has not been convicted of a violation of the FGC, if that person is:
 - a) Blind, as specified;
 - b) A resident Native American who is, in the discretion of CDFW, financially unable to pay the fee required for the license;
 - c) A person with a developmental disability, as specified; or
 - d) A resident of the state who is permanently unable to move from place to place without the aid of a wheelchair, walker, forearm crutches, or a comparable mobility-related device (FGC § 7151).
- 10) Provides that the Commission may issue, under such terms and conditions as it may impose, a permit to any organization conducting a special hunt for servicemembers or veterans residing in or assigned to a veterans or armed services medical facility authorizing the take of birds and mammals notwithstanding the prohibition on the possession of a loaded rifle or shotgun in any vehicle or conveyance or the prohibition on shooting at any game bird or mammal from a powerboat, sailboat, motor vehicle, or airplane (FGC § 317).
- 11) Prohibits any otherwise qualified individual with a disability from being excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal funds, solely due to their disability (29 USC § 794).
- 12) Prohibits any qualified individual with a disability from being excluded from participation in or denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity, solely due to their disability (42 USC § 12132).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** According to the author, “California is home to tens of thousands of children living with serious, life-threatening illnesses. However, when a child’s last wish is to go fishing or hunting for possibly the last time in their lives, these children often require reasonable accommodations for medical equipment or assistance. [This bill] expands reasonable accommodations to children with life-threatening illnesses so they may participate in supervised hunting and fishing experiences. This bill is about exposing all youth to California’s ecosystem, creating unforgettable experiences, and fostering the next generation of conservationists in California.”
- 2) **Background.** Access to the outdoors has a positive effect on everyone, including children with life-threatening illnesses. Hunting and fishing can provide children with an opportunity to spend precious time with family, connect with nature, and learn new skills. However, hunting and fishing have historically been challenging for individuals with disabilities to access. Access challenges include difficult terrain, extended time in the elements, and the need to operate equipment. Technological solutions to some of these challenges exist, including tracked chairs and adaptive hunting and fishing equipment, but this equipment can be prohibitively expensive and it can still be difficult to safely complete a hunting or fishing experience without help from an able-bodied assistant. To meet these needs, a number of nonprofit organizations exist to provide hunting opportunities to various communities of hunters with disabilities, including, among others, children with life-threatening illnesses and disabled veterans.

Accommodations are available for people with disabilities in California. The Commission and CDFW have implemented a variety of accommodations to allow individuals with disabilities to access fishing and hunting opportunities in California. CDFW offers free and reduced cost fishing licenses and group fishing permits for people with disabilities, and reduced cost hunting licenses for disabled veterans and recovering servicemembers. Additionally, CDFW issues three hunting permits to assist individuals with disabilities: the mobility impaired motor vehicle hunting permit [14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) § 251 (b)], the disabled muzzleloader scope permit [14 CCR § 353 (l)], and the disabled archer permit [14 CCR § 354 (j)]. Additionally, the Commission has authorized special hunts for hunters with disabilities (14 CCR § 715). Finally, CDFW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provide hunting blinds and accessible pond access for mobility-impaired hunters at 20 state wildlife areas and national wildlife refuges in California.

Achieving a dream hunting or fishing trip can still be a challenge. A child experiencing a life-threatening illness may have physical limitations and medical needs that impact their ability to navigate outdoor areas or operate hunting or fishing equipment. For these individuals, the existing accommodations may be insufficient for them to be able to realize their dream hunting or fishing experience. In particular, these children may benefit from an assistant who can help them throughout the process of taking fish or game. Currently, nonprofit organizations dedicated to supporting this population report that the law is ambiguous as to whether such assistance is authorized, which makes it difficult to provide opportunities in California; one organization reported that California children seeking a hunting or fishing experience needed to travel to Texas in order to successfully complete a hunt. This bill would direct the Commission to develop a program to increase opportunities to fish and hunt for children with life-threatening illnesses.

Programs exist in other states. A number of other states, including Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Maine, Mississippi, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Wisconsin, have enacted laws to create opportunities for children with life-threatening illnesses to access hunting and fishing experiences. Many of these programs allow for special permits to be issued, often free or at a reduced cost. Some of these permits authorize take outside of the established season or provide additional tags dedicated for children with life-threatening illnesses. The actual opportunities enabled by these programs are generally offered by nonprofit organizations that use volunteers to take children on guided hunting or fishing experiences.

- 3) **Proposed committee amendments.** The establishment of a program may be unnecessarily costly and burdensome, requiring dedicated staff at CDFW. Accommodations for impacted youth could instead be provided through regulations adopted by the Commission. Additionally, the Legislature may wish to make clear its intent when directing the Commission to adopt regulations by specifying that all requirements for hunting and fishing safety, licensing, and eligibility be adhered to, and that tags, stamps, permits, or reservations available only by lottery or auction will not be created or specially allocated for these purposes. *The Committee may wish to adopt the following amendments:*

Amendment 1

SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) Time in nature and access to outdoor recreation can provide meaningful experiences for youth with life-threatening illnesses.

(b) Hunting and fishing provide a valuable opportunity for youth with life-threatening illnesses to spend time with family, learn and develop skills, and fulfill lifelong dreams.

(c) Youth with life-threatening illnesses may require accommodations and adaptive equipment to equitably access outdoor recreation opportunities, including hunting and fishing.

(d) Existing programs for hunters with disabilities may not provide all necessary accommodations to allow youth with life-threatening illnesses to successfully complete hunting or fishing opportunities.

(e) It is the policy of the state, pursuant to Section 703.3 of the Fish and Game Code, that the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Fish and Game Commission use ecosystem-based management informed by credible science in all resources management decisions to the extent feasible.

(f) It is the policy of the state, pursuant to Section 1002 of the Public Resources Code, to ensure all Californians have equitable opportunities to safe and affordable access to nature and access to the benefits of nature, with a special emphasis on creating and promoting opportunities for people and communities that face disproportionate barriers.

Amendment 2

FGC § 318. (a)-(1) On or before January 1, 2028, the commission shall ~~establish a program~~ ***adopt regulations, except as provided in subdivision (b)***, to increase opportunities to fish, and to hunt big game, wild pigs, upland game birds, and migratory game birds, for resident youth with life-threatening illnesses.

~~(2) In developing the program, the commission, through a public process, shall consult with the department, interested nonprofit organizations that have goals and objectives directly related to the management and conservation of fish, big game, wild pigs, upland game birds, and migratory game bird species and primarily represent the interests of persons licensed pursuant to Sections 3031 and 7145, and any other interested parties.~~

(b) The program ***Regulations adopted pursuant to this section*** shall ***not*** include, ~~but is not limited to,~~ ***any of*** the following:

(1) ~~Any~~ ***An exemption from any*** hunter education requirements established pursuant to Article 2.5 (commencing with Section 3049) of Chapter 1 of Part 1 of Division 4 ~~shall not be waived.~~

(2) An exemption from any requirement to possess a valid hunting or sport fishing license.

(3) An exemption from any other requirements to be otherwise eligible to hunt or fish.

~~(2) The department shall take any potential allocation of an animal or animals to the program into consideration when determining the number of opportunities to be made available to the hunting community~~ ***(4) Any additional availability of tags, stamps, permits, or reservations beyond the allocations made available for all hunters or recreational fishers to take species with limited populations where such tags, stamps, permits, or reservations are available by lottery or auction only, such as by increasing the number of tags or allocating a subset of tags for this purpose.***

~~(3) The director shall notify the commission of any program activities at commission meetings.~~

~~(4) The commission may authorize the establishment of special hunts for the program within the general season for the species.~~

(c) ~~In establishing and implementing the program, the~~ ***In adopting regulations pursuant to subdivision (a), the*** commission shall:

(1) provide Ensure reasonable accommodations for participants in accordance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 12101 et seq.), Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. Sec. 794), and any applicable state disability laws ***are incorporated in the regulations.*** These accommodations shall include, but not be limited to, authorization for a qualified assistant to accompany the youth for the purposes of tracking, retrieving, and dispatching game or fish. The commission may adopt additional reasonable accommodations consistent with safe, ethical, and science-based wildlife management practices, including modified equipment or access provisions where appropriate. ~~The commission shall adopt rules and regulations as necessary to implement these accommodations.~~

(2) Consider authorizing special hunts within the general season for the species as an accommodation for youth with life-threatening illnesses.

(d) Nothing in this section precludes the commission from granting reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities in accordance with federal and state law ~~or limits the commission's existing authority under this code to adopt regulations implementing the program.~~

(e) (1) On or before January 1, 2032, the department shall prepare and submit a report to the relevant legislative policy and budget committees in both houses of the Legislature **and to the commission**. The report shall include, but is not limited to, the following:

(A) The number and types of opportunities provided to youth with life-threatening illnesses pursuant to the ~~program~~ **regulations adopted pursuant to this section** and the number of youth who participated in those opportunities. ~~The date or dates of each opportunity and any participating nonprofit organization that assisted with the opportunity.~~

(B) Recommendations, if any, ~~to improve the program~~ **for further regulatory or statutory changes to improve access for youth with life-threatening illnesses**. The department ~~may~~ **shall** solicit recommendations from stakeholders and the public, **including interested nonprofit organizations that have goals and objectives directly related to the management and conservation of fish, big game, wild pigs, upland game birds, and migratory game bird species and primarily represent the interests of persons licensed pursuant to Sections 3031 and 7145, and any other interested parties.**

(C) All department and commission costs in developing and implementing the ~~program~~ **regulations**, and revenues, if any, associated with ~~the program~~ **hunting and fishing opportunities for youth with life-threatening illnesses**.

(2) For purposes of the report described in paragraph (1), data collection efforts shall avoid duplication and data collected for other purposes shall be used to the extent feasible.

(3) A report submitted pursuant to paragraph (1) shall be submitted in compliance with Section 9795 of the Government Code.

(f) For purposes of this section, the following definitions apply:

(1) "Big game" has the same meaning as defined in Section 350 of Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations.

(2) "Life-threatening illness" means an illness that can lead to a possibility of a termination of life within five years or less as stated in writing by the patient's attending physician or surgeon.

~~(3) "Program" means the program developed by the commission pursuant to subdivision (a).~~

~~(4)~~(4) "Youth" means an individual younger than 18 years of age.

(g) The implementation of this section is contingent upon an appropriation for its purposes by the Legislature in the annual Budget Act or another act.

(h) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2033, and as of that date is repealed.

- 4) **Arguments in support.** Writing in support, SCI California Coalition states, “[This bill] is a compassionate, science-based measure that maintains our mission to provide wildlife conservation with science driven policies and provide opportunities to youth, in this case those that are stricken with life-threatening illnesses that may not allow them the time to participate otherwise. By providing these unique outdoor experiences, the bill offers meaningful support to families facing unimaginable challenges without compromising California’s rigorous wildlife management standards.”
- 5) **Arguments in opposition.** Writing for a coalition of animal rights groups, Social Compassion in Legislation states, “[This bill] misses the mark by expanding access to the killing of animals as a form of therapeutic or recreational activity. California has long been a national leader in promoting humane values and responsible wildlife stewardship. [this bill] moves the state in the wrong direction in promoting hunting, rather than promoting non-lethal, compassionate interactions with wildlife and nature. . . . Programs centered on wildlife observation, conservation, habitat restoration, and humane education provide meaningful and restorative experiences without ethical conflict.”
- 6) **Related legislation.** AB 2207 (Hadwick) of the current legislative session requires CDFW to establish a big game hunting tag transfer program for certain nonprofit organizations, including those that serve youth with a life-threatening illness or permanent physical disability.

AB 2523 (Gray) of 2020, would have required the Commission to establish a program to increase opportunities to fish and to hunt big game, upland game birds, and migratory game birds for youth with life-threatening illnesses and youth who lost a parent in service to the state or country. AB 2523 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Field of Dreams (sponsor)
 Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
 Black Brant Group, the
 Black Pearl Sportfishing
 Cal-Ore Wetlands and Waterfowl Council
 California Bowmen Hunters/State Archery Association
 California Deer Association
 California Hawking Club
 California Houndsmen for Conservation
 California Waterfowl Association
 Captain Rollo's Kids At Sea
 Coastal Charters
 Coastal Conservation Association of California
 Dana Landing Market and Fuel Dock
 Dana Wharf Sportfishing
 Fish Emeryville

Hunt of a Lifetime
Marina Del Rey Anglers
National Wild Turkey Federation
Reel Guppy Outdoors
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
San Diego County Wildlife Federation
San Diego Rod & Reel Club
Santa Barbara Landing
SCI California Coalition
Stoked on Fishing
Suisun Resource Conservation District
The Origins Foundation
Tulare Basin Wetlands Association
Wild Sheep Foundation, California Chapter

Opposition

Angel's Furry Friends Rescue
Animal Rescue Mission
Animal Rescuers for Change
Animal Wellness Action
Beezy's Rescue
Berkeley Animal Rights Center
Better Together Forever
Born Again Animal Rescue and Adoption
Compassionate Bay
Concerned Citizens Animal Rescue
Direct Action Everywhere
Earthheart
Feline Lucky Adventures
Giantmecha Syndicate
Greater Los Angeles Animal Spay Neuter Collaborative
Hugs and Kisses Animal Fund
Jaimie Brianna's Legacy Fund
Latino Alliance for Animal Care Foundation
Lockwood Animal Rescue Center
Long Beach Spay and Neuter Foundation
Los Angeles County Democrats for the Protection of Animals
NY 4 Whales
Pibbles N Kibbles Animal Rescue
Plant-based Advocates
Project Minnie
Rabbit Savior
Real Good Rescue
Seeds 4 Change Now Animal Rescue
Seniors Citizens for Humane Education and Legislation
Social Compassion in Legislation
Start Rescue
Students Against Animal Cruelty Club - Hueneme High School

The Canine Condition
The Pet Loss Support Group
The Spayce Project
Underdog Heroes, INC.
Women United for Animal Welfare (WUFAW)
958 Individuals

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