

CDFW has experienced longstanding budget challenges which have persisted despite repeated efforts over many years to address them. The department's service-based budgeting (SBB) analysis for fiscal year (FY) 2023-24 indicates the department (including its "Public Use & Enjoyment" program – where most of the tasks associated with sport fishing and hunting are located) is funded for only one-third of its mandated program work. The SBB effort highlights the degree to which CDFW operates with significant gaps between what is required to achieve its mandated mission and the level at which it is currently funded.

The Governor's January budget for FY 2026-27 included the permanent elimination of certain vacant state positions in environmental departments to generate budgetary savings, initially proposed as part of the 2025-26 budget but delayed subject to further legislative review. The June 2026 legislative budget agreement maintains, among other positions, about 60 vacant positions at CDFW.

COMMENTS:

1) **Purpose.** 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.** FGC and CDFW have implemented a variety of accommodations to allow individuals with disabilities to access fishing and hunting opportunities in California. For example, 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. According to the Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee, CDFW issues three hunting permits to assist individuals with disabilities – the mobility impaired motor vehicle hunting permit, the disabled muzzleloader scope permit, and the disabled archer permit. FGC has also authorized special hunts for hunters with disabilities. Additionally, 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.

Despite these efforts, the author argues, 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, and existing accommodations may be insufficient for these youth to realize their dream hunting or fishing experience.

Writing in support of the bill, a coalition of hunting, fishing, and conservation organizations argues, among other things, that for children facing grave health challenges, "a guided, supervised experience in nature offers healing, hope, and cherished family moments." The coalition contends that current systems, waiting periods, and seasonal limits can

unintentionally exclude vulnerable youth from timely experiences, and that this bill will inspire “the next generation of licensed hunters, anglers, and conservation advocates who will continue safeguarding California’s natural resources.”

Writing in opposition, Social Compassion in Legislation and a coalition of organizations argues that while they understand the intent of providing meaningful experiences for youth facing serious health challenges, this bill “misses the mark by expanding access to the killing of animals as a form of therapeutic or recreational activity” rather than “promoting non-lethal, compassionate interactions with wildlife and nature.”

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