



# TREIG E. PRONSCHINSKE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 92<sup>nd</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Testimony on Assembly Bill 850  
Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage  
January 24, 2018**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 850, Bella's Law.

Senator Moulton and I authored this proposal together because we both represent constituents who take part in the very special hunts organized for people with disabilities.

This proposal would allow a person to transfer, without limit, to a person with a disability, his or her approval of a hunter's choice deer hunting permit, a bonus deer hunting permit, a bobcat hunting and trapping permit, an otter trapping permit, a fisher trapping permit, a Canada goose hunting permit, a wild turkey hunting license, a sharp-tailed grouse hunting permit, a Class A bear license, an elk hunting license, a wolf harvesting license, or a sturgeon spearing license.

Bella's law was inspired by Bella Tiegs. Her father, Jeff Tiegs is here with me today to share how this bill will be such a positive change for hunters with disabilities. Allowing the ability of hunters with disabilities to receive permits more than once will enable more opportunities for those hunters to participate in our great sporting heritage. Current law only allows for a person to receive each type of transfer once.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this proposal.



# TERRY MOULTON



WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

23<sup>RD</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

**From:** Senator Terry Moulton

**To:** Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage

**Re:** **Testimony on Assembly Bill 850**  
**Relating to:** Transfer of hunting, fishing, and trapping approvals to persons with disabilities

**Date:** January 24, 2018

Mr. Chairman and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to you today. As you know, hunting can be a great and rewarding pastime. There is nothing quite like the soft sounds of a beautiful forest to help put you in a good mood. What's even better than that is the smell of the venison cooking slowly in a crockpot.

There are a few different ways to get into the sport of hunting and fishing in our state. The most popular way is learning through a family member, but it's also common to bring along a friend who is new to the sport and teach them the ropes until they are hooked. Another way to give others the opportunity to hunt or fish is to transfer your tags to another person. Some sportsmen transfer tags because they themselves might not have the time to use them during the season. Other times sportsmen transfer tags to give someone a chance they might not have already had to hunt a specific animal.

Currently, if someone receives an approval for hunting, they could transfer it to certain groups of people depending on what the approval is. Unfortunately, once a person receives a transferred approval, they cannot get that approval transferred again. For example, a person who receives a bear permit could transfer the permit to a disabled person. However, the person who receives the approval can only receive it once in their lifetime. For disabled people, getting the chance to hunt big game should not be a once in a lifetime opportunity, especially if there are people willing to transfer their hunting and fishing approvals to them.

Specifically, Assembly Bill 850 will allow a person to transfer any of their hunting, fishing, or trapping approvals to a disabled person, as long as they have not already received the transferred approval that season. This includes deer, sturgeon spearing, bobcat hunting and trapping, otter trapping, wild turkey, grouse, bear and a few other approvals. This bill also allows a disabled person to receive a transferred hunting approval more than once. This means that if a disabled person got a bear tag but they weren't successful, another person could transfer their bear tag to the disabled person in the following season and give them another chance.

I would ask you to please recommend the passage of Assembly Bill 850 to help provide disabled individuals with these additional hunting opportunities. Thank you again for allowing me to submit testimony today.

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## Bella's Law

On September 30th 2017, Bella's bear hunt began. I had been notified prior to the hunt that a man by the name of Bob Mcmorrow had drawn a bear tag and was willing to donate and transfer that tag to my daughter Bella. I was beyond excited to tell Bella that we were heading up north on her very first bear hunt. We loaded the truck and away we went. Saturday morning came and we met the group that was taking us on the hunt. All the dogs were barking and ready to go!

The first day consisted of the dogs trying to pick up the scent of a fresh set of bear tracks, but they would sometimes be distracted by coyotes, a bobcat, and even a deer or two. We drove many trails and backroads with Bella in the truck following the hounds with GPS. Everyone was working and trying so hard to get a bear treed for Bella. The end of Saturday's hunt rolled around with no luck. It was sure fun though!

Sunday morning started with the most beautiful sunrise and the gal that we were riding with, stopped the truck, pulled her phone out, and took a picture of the sky and said, "Bella, today is the day you get your first bear"! So away we went and the dogs again were unable to pick up on any scent, but again, we kept pushing forward. We were scheduled to leave that day, which was Sunday October 1<sup>st</sup>, by noon. Well wouldn't you know it 11:45 rolled around and we had to say our goodbyes. We expressed our appreciation to the whole group and commended each and every one of them on how hard they all had worked on trying to get Bella her first bear.

Well, we left bear camp and was headed south and had made it 45 min and came to a gas station with a subway in it and I told my dad who was with us that, "we should stop for a sandwich and Bella needs hers meds". So we ate, gave medicines to Bella, and was walking to the truck, when my phone rang. It was one of the guys from bear camp and he said "Jeff, you won't believe it, but the dogs just cut a track and we have a good bear in the tree. If you want it, come get it"! Needless to say, my heart skipped a beat or two, and our compass was pointed due north!

We arrived back at the location where they treed the bear, and there was a line of people that started by the side of the road, and led all the way to the tree that the bear was in. I put Bella over my shoulder, and away we went with grandpa in tow. I could immediately hear the dogs barking at the tree, so it was easy to find. When we arrived at the tree, we had a group of people instructing us on what was about to happen. We had made a game plan that had safety first in mind. With Bella being handicapped, the last thing we wanted was to have a wounded bear on the ground! So we got setup, and Bella made a perfect, clean shot on the bear, which had expired before it got to the ground. Bella just got her first bear, and let me tell you, there wasn't a dry eye in the whole group!

This was one of the proudest moments of my life. Watching my first born child, my daughter, who has cerebral palsy, who has overcome so many obstacles, harvest her very first bear! I was at a loss for words.

Which leads us to why we're here today. The current law allows individuals who win the Wisconsin DNR's preference point lottery system to transfer their preference point hunting approval to a minor, or a person with a disability, only once. This new bill would remove the limit on how many times a person with a disability can receive a transferred approval.

In some instances, drawing a bear tag may take several years, depending on which zone is applied for. In Bella's case, we have an open invite to come and hunt bear with them every year, if she could get a tag. If someone were to have a terminal illness, and has received a transfer tag in the past, but wants to maybe have one more chance at another opportunity, currently that won't happen. Or if Bella would've been unsuccessful on her hunt, and her dream was to have a bear, that won't happen. It would be like telling your child who doesn't have a disability, that they can only play one game of basketball, or one game of football, or one game of baseball, or one game of volleyball, the list goes on. As if there isn't enough challenges for the disabled to overcome, I don't feel that this issue needs to be one of them. The benefit of passing this bill would not only be a game changer for Bella, but for so many others with disabilities and their families. Hunting has just began to open so many doors for Bella, and we are so excited to get her into the outdoors and enjoy what she has been missing for so long.

Jeff Tiegs  
Mondovi, WI

To Who It May Concern,

Re: Personal Experiences in Regards to Bear Hunting

A little about my background. I have been involved in the outdoor community since I was a child. My dad started taking me ice fishing when I was 3 and everything's continued from there. When I was 14, I helped to organize the Grand River Turkey Club Inc. in Marquette, WI., an organization that I still sit on the Board of Directors today 28 years later. I was involved in a single car accident in June of 2005 that should have taken my life when the driver fell asleep behind the wheel, crossed the center line and we hit abridge embankment head-on. I fractures 4 vertebra in my lower spine, tore the aorta from the heart, shattered every rib in my chest, broke both hips and upper legs, broke the pelvis and right arm, severed the pancreas and caused intestinal damage. This is a short list of the bodily damage that was done. After these injuries, I am now confined to a manual wheelchair for the rest of my life. This makes getting around in the outdoors more difficult than ever.

Since being injured, I have joined other state wide disable outdoor organizations and stay active in them. Adaptive Sportsmen, United Federation for Disabled Sportsmen, Outdoor Adventure for Disabled Sportsmen, Empowered Dream Hunts, Wheel 'Em Inn, and Challenge the Outdoors Inc. Each one offers a different advantage to the disable sportsperson, but the one thing they all have is networking amongst the individuals and their families.

With Challenge the Outdoors, I have been a member for 13 years, a Board of Director for 8 years, and a Past President for 2 Years. This does not include the numerous committees that I've operated or coordinated through the years. I've even organized a disabled goose hunt near the Horicon Marsh for nearly 10 years. So I believe that I am acutely qualified to speak about the outdoors form an able-bodied and disabled sportspersons perspective.

Two years ago, I was part of the process to get the legislation changed for transferability of tags to disabled individuals and Purple Heart recipients. The only restriction was that it could only be done once in a lifetime. For many disabled individuals, this window can be very short to be able to do anything. One day, week or month, they can feel really good, but on the drop of a dime, they're health can change significantly. If they have a bear tag transferred to them and they get sick, even a month later, there's a good chance they'll never even be able to get out into the outdoors to use the tag. Plus, they're opportunity to get another tag transferred to them has just been used up. We need to remember, we are dealing with disabled individuals. They're muscled, body tissue, electrical currents don't function the same way as "normal" individuals. Yes they are good people, yeas they love the outdoors just as much as anyone else, no they are not going to go into some school or shopping center and shoot up the place just because they look different. They just have a difficult time getting around the woods, a shoreline or anything with an obstacle.

When I got my tag transferred to me 2 years ago, it was the greatest feeling in the world for me. While I was in the woods, I felt at home. I was able to spend days in the woods with my family members. They loved spending time with me in this way. They've told me that they haven't seen me that happy in a very long time. This is something that I've heard from many families when I did the disable goose hunt as well. When you are able to get a disabled hunter/fisherperson out into the outdoors that those are the memories that the families hold onto and cherish as the disabled individual's body deteriorates. I know one family personally that went to Wyoming and the individual got help from a group of friends to achieve a lifelong dream of harvesting an antelope. He was able to get one. It didn't matter that it was

one the smaller size, it was the adventure that was what made him happy, but made the family happier. Between the time when he got his antelope and the time when he was getting his mount back from the taxidermist, the disabled individual unfortunately passed away. He never got to see his prize antelope, but his family cherishes that antelope and it is hanging in their living room today and they remember him and their trip everyday just by looking at the mount. This is when I'm referring to that disabled individuals can feel good one day and not be with us because of health reasons the next.

When I had my bear tag, I was able to hunt 14 days out of 18 days before I seen a single bear. I was able to harvest that bear. It wasn't the huge, it was average size, but the adrenaline rush was enormous! The excitement for the family I believe was even more ecstatic. I was lucky to be able to hunt all those days though. I did get some small bed sores from sitting all those days. I had to get medication to treat those and stay in bed for a couple days afterwards. So it didn't come without consequences. These will leave scars on my body for the rest of my life. I probably wouldn't have pushed through so far to get this bear, but I knew with the laws the way they were that this was more than likely my only chance to get a bear or even go bear hunting. So I had to make the most of the opportunity that I had in front of me. The law dictated what I had to do.

I'm thankful that the law allows for a single opportunity for a transfer tag for different species, but it also makes it so disabled individuals have to put themselves into harm's way because they have know that it's a onetime transfer and you have to make the most of the opportunity.

Thanks you for your time and feel free to contact me with further questions and/or comments,

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To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Rick Verbsky, and I have been providing bear hunts for handicap children, veterans, and adults for the last 6 years. Over that time, I have learned so much about these individuals, very humbling things. You see, they are not the ones with the handicaps, we are. I can selfishly say that the joy I see in their eyes during these hunts, well words cannot describe how it makes me feel. What started as a single hunt has grown into an organization of people wanting to help and be part of this, and the creation of Dick Verbsky's Disadvantaged Adventures. A non-profit company we created hoping to expand these experiences to more people and hopefully raise enough money over time to be able to provide handicap accessible projects in the community giving the ability of experiencing our great outdoors to everyone.

I am writing this letter to you to help you understand some of the challenges I face every year trying to provide these hunts to deserving kids and veterans. The cost and work I donate every year, and the work so many others provide are easy things for me to work through with no help. What I cannot do, and things I just don't understand why they are even issues, is something I am hoping you can help with.

These are as follows:

#### Tags

Right now it takes anywhere from 8 to 10 years of applying to get a bear harvest tag. The only way we have been able to provide these hunts is to find people who will donate their tag after waiting 8 or more years to get it. This is very hard. And when we do, and if mother nature does not cooperate, the handicap person cannot have another tag donated, EVER. To me this makes no sense. I have never understood why the DNR would not allocate a certain number of these tags strictly for individuals who have met their current criteria for being handicap. The DNR already has policies which would prevent those out there from abusing the system. And why would the DNR restrict how many times someone who is handicap can receive a donated tag?

Why not allow a handicap person to receive donated tags until they harvest an animal? Then make them wait 8 years to get another chance.

#### Seasons

Another challenge we face is the hunting season rotation between the dog hunters and the bait hunters. As you know the bait hunters and dog hunters alternate from year to year who gets to go first. Due to the nature of our hunts, and the mobility issues that usually are part of that hunt, our hunts are always over bait. This means that every other year the hunter has to wait another week before hunting, and the bears are stressed from being chased all week. This greatly reduces their chances of a successful hunt.

Currently the DNR has a special youth season for deer and turkeys. Why can't they simply allow handicap hunters to start 5 days before the regular bear season opens? And if you have a handicap certification from the DNR, why can't that person start every year at the same time regardless of who goes first, the dog hunters or the bait hunters? Keep in mind the dog hunters are chasing bear with their dogs for up to 2 months before the season opens. Basically hunting, just not harvesting the bear. They call it practicing.

I hope this information is helpful to you as you discuss this topic. I truly believe this is an issue where

there really are no logical arguments against these types of changes, but more of a situation where the law has not caught up to the reality of the situation.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Rick Verbsky

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