



Virginia Property Rights Alliance

TO PROTECT AND PROMOTE THE RIGHTS OF VIRGINIA LANDOWNERS

October 5, 2026

Dear Delegate,

On behalf of the Virginia Property Rights Alliance (VPRA), we respectfully call your attention to the growing problem of repeated, unwanted hound-hunting trespass across the Commonwealth. As complaints continue to rise year-over-year, this perennial assault on private property rights requires a legislative solution. The Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) currently lacks the funding and authority to adequately regulate hound hunting and prevent abuses. We hope you will join VPRA and many frustrated property owners during the upcoming General Assembly session to pursue a balanced solution.

Hound Hunting has Evolved into Persistent Conflict

Only nine states still allow hound hunting. All of them, except Virginia, attempt to regulate hound hunting to protect the rights of homeowners and landowners to peaceably enjoy their property.

Several trends are intensifying the frustration: population growth and increased development pressure; expanded use of public roads during hunts; smaller land parcels available for hunting; modern tracking technology and vehicle use during the chase; changing public expectations regarding privacy; lack of meaningful regulation; and inconsistent enforcement by local/state law enforcement agencies and Commonwealth's Attorneys across multiple jurisdictions.

Why the Laws in Virginia are Confusing to Property Owners

1. The "Right to Retrieve" Statute

Virginia's unique "right to retrieve" statute, Va. Code § 18.2-136, was enacted in 1936 and permits hunters to enter private property to retrieve hunting dogs without permission and over the objection of landowners.

The statute imposes only two limitations: hunters may not carry firearms or other weapons onto the property, and they may not use vehicles while entering or traversing the property. Beyond those restrictions, the statute does not limit the number of individuals involved, the manner or duration of the search, or the frequency of entry onto private land.

In September 2024, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) successfully argued in court that Va. Code § 18.2-136 creates only an exception to Virginia's criminal trespass laws and does not alter the law of common-law trespass. This distinction is often difficult for landowners to understand and helps explain why conflicts arise when law enforcement officers advise property owners that they have limited authority to intervene.

While landowners may still have potential civil remedies under common-law trespass principles, the statute generally precludes criminal enforcement in retrieval situations covered by § 18.2-136.

VPRA recognizes that this is a sensitive issue, particularly for legislators representing rural areas. **To be CLEAR, the VPRA is not currently advocating any change to Virginia's "right to retrieve" statute.**

2. The “Intentional Release” Statute

Virginia’s so-called “intentional release” statute, Va. Code § 18.2-132.1, ideally should deter the habitual release of hunting hounds onto private property. In practice, however, it establishes an extremely high burden of proof by requiring evidence of intentionality before a violation can be established. Many property owners view the statute as ineffective in preventing the repeated abuse of releasing hounds onto private property, especially after hunters and hunt clubs have been asked to stop.

Despite thousands of hound-related complaints recorded by DWR each year, only six summonses have been issued across the Commonwealth over the past four years (since Oct 1, 2022) for violations of Va. Code § 18.2-132.1. Trespass by hunters using dogs.

That is a disappointing statistic that deserves close scrutiny from lawmakers.

Recommended Legislative Priorities

VPRA believes the General Assembly should focus on two reforms during the next session:

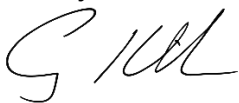
1. **Implement a permit system** that gives DWR the funding, authority, and tools needed to regulate hound hunting like every other hunting activity in Virginia.
2. **Modernize select trespass laws** to effectively deter cases of repeated abuse while also preserving the long-standing hound-hunting traditions of Virginia.

We believe the only way to protect hound hunting is to regulate it—just like every other hunting or fishing sport in Virginia. As we hope you will see, there is a lot of confusion and ambiguity in the Code of Virginia and the number of complaints from private property owners continues to increase.

We fear that with every General Assembly session that passes without any clarifying or modernization of the laws that govern hound hunting, those who abuse the current gap in the existing laws will remain emboldened to continue this behavior towards private property owners across the Commonwealth. Ultimately, this only hurts the responsible, practical, and respectful hunters.

We respectfully ask you to join us during the upcoming General Assembly session to help find a balanced solution.

Sincerely,



Gary Kimberlin
President, Virginia Property Rights Alliance