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Howard County Council unanimously approves hunting-safety bill

Ulman measure was much debated, heavily amended

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The Howard County Council unanimously approved a bill last night intended to help avoid hunting accidents like the December incident in which an errant slug aimed at a deer shattered a Clarksville day care center front window and frightened the children and teachers inside.

The 5-0 vote on a much-debated, heavily amended bill submitted by County Executive Ken Ulman makes hunters liable for a civil fine of up to \$1,000 - the most allowed under law - if they ignore safety rules and damage private property with a gunshot.

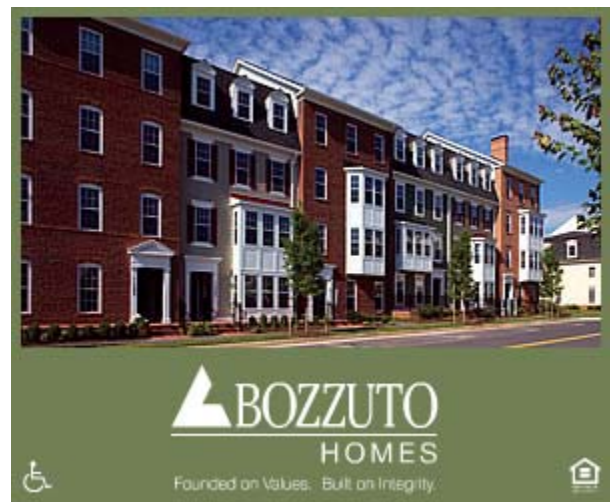
The deer hunter in the December incident escaped prosecution because state law requires proof of willful intent.

The final bill was "significantly watered down in a way I'm disappointed about," said Councilwoman Jen Terrasa, a Kings Contrivance Democrat who pushed for stricter rules in the original version.

Ulman's bill sought a doubling of the 150-yard shooting safety zone and would have prohibited hunting on less than 10 acres. The final bill removed those limits but included the fine and a requirement that hunters not fire unless a safe backstop is visible.

All five council members agreed after a long discussion that the final bill, while not perfect, improves chances for public safety.

Councilman Greg Fox, a Fulton Republican, praised the bill for putting "more accountability, responsibility and liability on hunters," without damaging their ability to hunt.



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