

April 10, 2017

Gentle Jungle
P.O. Box #832
Lebec, CA 93243

Dear Committee on Personnel and Animal Welfare,

I am writing in strong **OPPOSITION** to agenda item #16-1357. Please include this letter into public record to be included in any hearing, studies, and or reports pertaining to this issue.

My name is Molly O'Neill and I have been training animals, domestic and exotic, for six years in the entertainment business. I am a current member of the Local 399 Union. I would like to OPPOSE this agenda item on two main points. The first is misinformation and the second is the need to co-exist with animals.

First, the public is widely misinformed about animals in the entertainment business. Extremists have spent millions of dollars encouraging the public to believe that these animals are mistreated or unhappy. The original summary for this very agenda claimed, "At times, animal handlers are aggressive and the birds and snakes are tossed at unsuspecting visitors to force an interaction." I have never seen, nor have I heard any stories of such ridiculous and unsafe behavior in this business. I have seen first hand the professionalism of the trainers that work in this business. The trainers I know dedicate their lives to their animals and are on call 24/7 to care for them. There is an incredible elephant trainer who invented the perfect pad for an elephant with one leg shorter than the other. This invention kept the elephant from the certain back injury in the future because it provided the most natural way possible to even out her legs. Several trainers I know have spent thousands of dollars on costly surgeries for their exotic animals. These surgeries healed injuries that would have easily killed the animal in the wild. And, no, I'm not talking about injuries as a result of performing, I am speaking of cancer and joint issues as the animals naturally age. However, if you won't take my word for it, please ask one of the five different entities who monitor our behavior towards our animals and our care for our animals on a regular basis. Our facility is regularly inspected by USDA, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and California Fish and Wildlife Service as well as receiving permits from the city. When we are at work, we are joined every day by a representative from the American Humane Association or a like-minded organization, to observe the action the animal is being asked to do. That representative then records any and all pertinent information about the animal and their trainers. You can actually call American Humane today and ask how I treated my dog at work last week. We welcome these organizations inspecting our property, observing our animals, and constantly watching what we do. We welcome these inspections because we all have the same goal: to make sure the animal is healthy, happy, well-cared for, and safe. With all of these protections and inspections for the

good of the animals, this movement to ban animals in any capacity is completely unnecessary.

In the hopes of widening the perspective on this issue, I have to say that it is imperative we figure out the best way to co-exist with wild animals. Humans have been destroying some of these animals' natural habitats for years causing them to become endangered or extinct. Outreach through events, film, and more enable ambassador animals to share a once in a lifetime experience with people. Many people around the world learn about animals from a film or a personal one on one experience with a rare animal. Now, we are discussing a ban on the very experience that sparked many people's passion for animals in the first place. Trainers have an incredible, contagious passion for animals as well. So much so, they have dedicated their entire life to learning more about them, working with them, and caring for them. Animal trainers don't just assign feelings to a general type of animal. They spend every moment facilitating the mental and physical needs of every individual creature they work with. The extra time put in doesn't make them any more money, it doesn't get them on the cover of magazines, and it certainly doesn't gain the attention of celebrities or lawmakers. However, to the people who really care for animals...I mean truly attend to their needs every day...the well being of the animal matters. In a world where we as humans are destroying natural habitat for many wild animals, we must learn to co-exist and inspire others to care. Please do not put these animals out of sight and out of mind. People can benefit from interacting with well-trained ambassador animals by becoming more passionate to protect endangered species and by learning from the animal trainers who spend day in and day out with these special creatures. Please consider what you do when you ban these animals from interacting with the public.

Sincerely,
Molly O'Neill
Animal Trainer
Gentle Jungle, Inc.
Local 399 Union Member