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## OPPOSITION to Agenda item 16-1357

1 message

**Leslie Gordon** <lesliegordon765@yahoo.com>

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Cc: Lesliegordon765 <lesliegordon765@yahoo.com>

From: Leslie Gordon, Wildlife Educator

### OPPOSITION to Agenda item 16-1357

Summary: Please say **NO** (but thank you) to **16-1357** and instead consider supporting animal abuse or neglect laws, a more practical system of permitting wild animals, and establishing professional and humane standards that fit all exotics caretakers.

Greetings,

I am a professional wildlife educator working at the Natural History Museum of LA County. While I can not speak on their behalf, I want to be clear that the Museum could potentially be one of the organizations negatively impacted by this ordinance. While NHM is a legitimate educational facility, the Museum is not AZA accredited, nor is it practical for them to become so.

The language of this proposal is too broad, too emotional, and too unscientific to be useful, and my concern is that the ultimate goal is toward a ban of all wild exotics in captivity- an extremely dramatic and unfounded action. People abuse their dogs, yet a motion to ban dog ownership or dog walking would be absurd. If people are abusing their exotic animals, we should be working on enforcement of proper permits and cruelty laws.

Further, It is unclear who would determine if a display was "legitimate", and it appears that could be left wide open to interpretation. Even the Museum's popular Live Animal Program presentations that have entertained audiences, while educating them about wildlife, for more than 2 decades could be considered in violation with such broad language and an individual with an agenda. I have seen many times over when confusing or unspecific legislation is put forth, the people charged with enforcement can be unclear on what to do when, such as when an Animal Control officer recently tried to confiscate a colleague's entire collection of neonate turtles on display at a Museum event, citing the ban of sales on neonate slider turtles. They were not for sale, and were a different species. After showing him the legislation and allowing him to read it, he redacted its assertions down and the display continued.

Further, the language in the community statement leads me to believe the individuals writing may not have a complete understanding of animal behavior and what a professional interaction might look like. Example: "treated inhumanely in an effort to coax tricks and human interaction causing physical and mental trauma putting the animal and public at potential risk" is a very subjective statement that, based on the agenda of the individual could be applied to just about any "working" animal in Los Angeles from Filming, Museum exhibitions and events that welcome local herpetological or other animal club exhibitions, community/nature center animal shows, to dog trainers leading classes in the park. Human interaction is not innately damaging, and "tricks" are often confused by lay people with enrichment or other kinds of training. In fact, most animals in captivity, exotic or domestic could greatly benefit from species-specific training/human interaction of some kind.

But if emotional pleas are being considered, I will submit that birthday party ventures are sometimes a child's first introduction to a wild small animal that is not typically shown in large zoos or exhibits. The emotional connections that children and adults make at these events, when professionally done, cannot be understated in the power to incite conservation action and careers in the field. Not to mention this is often a new animal keeper's first job in the industry. I have endless anecdotes to this effect of guests telling me their personal stories of being inspired to act, and there is

ample research available showing the power of a human/animal connection at animal presentations at zoos. These animals in these smaller organizations are often rescues from the dark side of the pet trade, that zoos are unable to assist with, and shutting down ventures like these could create a deepening need to euthanize homeless exotics. Some of the organizations who would suffer from this legislation also exhibit at Museum events.

**\*\*Enforcement of professional and humane standards for permitting would be a more appropriate way to approach the issue of individuals who are abusive or neglectful. I, and many other local professionals, would be glad to assist a committee for the Council in determining what those standards might look like.\*\***

Please consider supporting animal abuse or neglect laws, a more practical system of permitting wild animals, and establishing professional and humane standards that fit all exotics caretakers, but say **NO** (but thank you) to **16-1357**.

Leslie Gordon

18-Year Professional Wild Animal Keeper/ Educator/ Manager