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Opposition to agenda item #161357

1 message

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To: adam.lid@lacity.org, david.ryu@lacity.org, paul.koretz@lacity.org, paul.krekorian@lacity.org

Please include this letter into public record to be included in any hearing, studies, or reports pertaining to this issue.

Dear Council Members,

I am writing to express my opposition to agenda item #161357. And I wish to comment on many aspects of the original motion submitted by Councilman David Ryu.

The use of wild and exotic animals, particularly in circuses, has desensitized generations of people and taught our children that it is perfectly acceptable to treat wild and exotic animals as objects or toys. Has Councilman David Ryu conducted city-wide, state-wide, country-wide, research or opinion polls which specifically ask if people feel that way? I doubt the majority of sensible Angelenos feel this way. How does he speak for us all, in our “desensitization”?

The City of Los Angeles has also seen displays of snakes, reptiles, birds, and non-human primates on the public sidewalk and in parks, where handlers have offered photos with animals in exchange for a monetary donation.

And of all such occurrences, what percentage actually results in harm to people or animal? What statistical research has been done?

At times, the animal handlers are aggressive and the birds and snakes are tossed at unsuspecting visitors to force an interaction.

I'm sure this happens. But, as Councilman Ryu says, “At times...”. Again, what research shows this is an actual problem relative to the number of completely harmless public displays and interactions? From all the caring, cautious, gentle displays of animals I've seen over decades, including wild & exotic, I can only conclude that this problem pertains to a minority of public animal handlers. Let's not strip away yet another personal freedom from the good majority due to the actions of the minority.

This use and misuse of wild and exotic animals for personal or public entertainment and financial gain has a long and unfortunate history. The practice has led to tremendous pain for these animals who often suffer from loneliness, malnutrition and the overwhelming stress of lengthy confinements during transport. Further, to get animals to perform “tricks” and other acts unnatural to them, handlers have been repeatedly shown to use inhumane training techniques.

Wild and exotic animals hold instinctive social and physical needs specific or indigenous to their natural environments. If these animals are unable to express their normal behaviors, they can suffer from physical and mental trauma. This behavior impacts the welfare of these animals, which places the safety of the animal and the public at risk.

I will ask the Council to address and clearly define four words within these paragraphs: “use”, “misuse”, “wild”, “exotic”. And to clarify the motion to include their precise meaning in this motion, before any further action is taken and to submit the revised motion for public clarification. And again, I call for real statistical evidence that a majority of animal handlers are, as one example from the above text, using “inhumane training techniques”.

Los Angeles has long been a leader in protecting wild and exotic animals, including passing a ban on the use of bullhooks in 2014, an effort led by 5th District Councilmember Paul Koretz that led to a ban in California this year. My office has also pushed for tighter rules on private displays of wild and exotic animals after experiencing abuses in my district that included an elephant, lion, and a baby giraffe being rented out as props for private events in the Hollywood Hills.

These efforts are all steps along the way to a more permanent resolution to wild and exotic animal exhibitions.

What might Councilman Ryu and other Council members consider a more permanent resolution to wild and exotic animal exhibitions? The banning of wild/exotic animal exhibitions of any kind?

It is time that the City of Los Angeles take action to make clear that exhibiting wild and exotic animals in such a way is no longer in line with our City's values.

I respectfully disagree; the City of Los Angeles need not take any action on this matter. Citizens can always call the police or other city agencies if animals are seen being treated disrespectfully or have evidence that a handler is mistreating an animal.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the City Attorney be requested to prepare and present an ordinance which would prohibit the exhibition of wild or exotic animals for entertainment or amusement, including circuses, other wild or exotic animal shows, and rentals for house parties, with exceptions for accredited zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, legitimate filming purposes, research facilities, and legitimate conservation-related programs or presentations.

I sincerely ask that the council dismiss this motion entirely.

Thank you for your time,

Barry Michael Wehrli