

April 26, 2017

Los Angeles City Council

Dear Committee on Personnel and Animal Welfare:

OPPOSITION to agenda item #16-1357. Please enter this letter into the public record to be included in any hearings, studies, and reports pertaining to this issue.

I am concerned with the recent motion by the City of Los Angeles titled "Exotic Animal Ban". The motion is written with language that is typical of extreme animal rights groups and is not grounded in science. I would hope our elected city officials would leave their bias behind and maintain a professional stance that carefully evaluates scientific information to do what is best for the City of Los Angeles. I believe the motion should be re-written in a factual non-biased manner.

I have extensive exotic and wild animal expertise. I graduated from UC Davis Veterinary School and I have over 20 years of experience as a zoo veterinarian. I am one of only 187 people worldwide that has achieved Diplomate status in the American College of Zoological Medicine. As an animal care expert, I have devoted my life to caring for animals, including the conservation of endangered species and captive wild animals. My hope in interpreting the current motion is that our council members like me, care about animal welfare and would like to ensure safety for the citizens. Therefore, I would like to overlook the extreme and misguided animal activist rhetoric written in the current motion and help modify the motion with more appropriate language.

In order to ensure safety for our citizens and uphold high animal welfare standards there are two legitimate points of concern that I can distill from the document.

Point One. The Council members are concerned with individuals on public streets exhibiting exotic pets. These people are most often found in Hollywood and our neighboring beaches such as the City of Santa Monica. These individuals are inappropriately using personal exotic pets as street displays in hopes for a profit. They do not possess a USDA exhibitor's license and are not professionally trained or regulated. They likely provide little to no veterinary care for their animals, and no awareness of transmissible disease. In order for the city of Los Angeles to curb this unskilled and potentially dangerous activity they have proposed this exotic animal ban. I respectfully suggest the City of Los Angeles review and follow the professionally written "Exotic and Wild Animals Ordinance" accomplished by the City of Santa Monica.

Point Two. The City Council expressed concerns with the safety of its citizens when exotic animals are utilized by professional businesses in private settings. These professional animal experts are regulated by California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the USDA. They are subjected to USDA Animal Care inspectors that conduct rigorous, frequent, unannounced inspections pursuant to the Animal Welfare Act. USDA inspections are conducted by veterinarians that review the premises, records, husbandry practices, program of veterinary care, and animal handling procedures to ensure the animals are receiving humane care. The USDA is currently in agreement that some animals are too dangerous to allow unprotected contact. On Aug 8, 2016 APHIS announced "We currently identify some animals as dangerous, including, but not limited to, nondomestic felids (specifically lions, tigers, jaguars, mountain lions, cheetahs, and any hybrids thereof), wolves, bears, certain nonhuman primates (such as gorillas, chimps, and macaques), elephants, hippopotamuses, rhinoceroses, moose, bison. The USDA is moving forward to restrict public interaction with the species listed. I suggest the City of Los Angeles leave the determination of species-specific animals of concern to our Federal Government that is currently addressing the same concerns.

The City of Los Angeles has hundreds of trained animal professionals that are operating legally and skillfully within the city limits. These professionals fill various specialty niches that support our city in many ways. Some examples follow. The animal professionals at the Los Angeles Zoo provide a sanctuary for endangered animals where breeding, conservation, and species reintroduction programs are paramount. The animal professionals that specialize in trained animals provide behaviorally enriched animals for our film industry. Other animal professionals in Los Angeles rescue exotic animals from inappropriate conditions to provide a permanent home, appropriate animal husbandry, and veterinary care 365 days a year, and share these ambassador animals with the public for education programs. All of these tax paying animal professionals in the City of Los Angeles have intense oversight from the USDA and California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Public education in the life sciences and wildlife conservation is essential for preventing the loss of biodiversity. A report from the World Wildlife Fund states "Global populations of vertebrates -- mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish -- have declined by 58 percent between 1970 and 2012 due to human activity". The report also states that "without immediate intervention global wildlife populations could drop two-thirds by 2020. This loss of wildlife is startling, and people are at risk as well. Without action, the Earth will become much less hospitable for all living things. We must consider our impact on nature as we make development, economic, business, and lifestyle choices. A shared understanding of the link between humanity and nature is essential to making profound changes that will allow all life to thrive for generations to come." We are in the midst of a mass extinction of animals.

The ambassador animals of Los Angeles are currently inspiring our citizens to learn about their environment and to care about preserving our earth. These ambassadors already have intense governmental oversight and are well taken care of. The City Council can not fall prey to the animal activist agenda. Those organizations do nothing to help conservation of animals or biological education. Those organizations are well known to use false images that were acquired from decades ago, from locations overseas or more routinely digitally manipulated. The animal rights organizations routinely exploit images of animals for their financial gain. They are multi-million dollar enterprises that are staffed heavily by lawyers, fundraisers and marketers, not animal experts, and they see the City of Los Angeles as a large audience to continue to push their agenda.

I urge you to join in union with the animal experts in the City of Los Angeles as we all have the same common ground to care deeply for the animals already in our care. As you move forward with the ban I urge you to look to the City of Santa Monica that clearly distinguished the unregulated exotic pet owner from the true animal professionals.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leah Greer", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Leah Greer, DVM, Diplomate American College of Zoological Medicine