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Chair Torrey Westrom  
Senate Agriculture and Rural Development Finance and Policy Committee  
95 University Avenue W. Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 3201  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chairman Westrom and members of the committee,

The Animal Legal Defense Fund, the nation's preeminent legal advocacy organization for animals, strongly opposes SF 4280 – a bill which would exempt exhibitors accredited by the Zoological Association of America (ZAA) from Minnesota's current law restricting the possession of dangerous wild animals.

Such an exemption would undermine the strength of Minnesota's Regulated Animal Law by allowing subpar facilities to exhibit dangerous wild animals, creating an unnecessary risk to public safety that was largely eliminated by the passage of the current law in 2005.

Minnesota has one of the strongest laws in the country prohibiting the private possession of dangerous wild animals such as bears, big cats, and primates. Under current law, ownership of these animals is prohibited unless certain exemptions are met, such as accreditation by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). The AZA, an established zoo trade organization that represents some of the most well-respected zoos in the country, including the Minnesota Zoo, ensures that facilities employ the highest standards of animal care and public safety when possessing and exhibiting otherwise dangerous wild animals. The AZA has been the top accrediting body for zoos and aquariums since 1924.

The ZAA has no affiliation with the AZA and is notorious for its inadequate safety standards and accreditation of mismanaged facilities. Established in 2005, the ZAA accredits approximately sixty facilities across the country, many of which allow for public contact with dangerous animals like big cat cubs, bears, and primates. Unlike the AZA, the ZAA has minimal and outdated standards set for safety, personnel training, and veterinary requirements for its accredited facilities. Unfortunately, due to these low standards, there have been many documented instances of attacks, escapes, animal welfare violations, and animal deaths, at ZAA accredited facilities across the country.

In 2015, the USDA brought an enforcement action against the owner and manager of three affiliated ZAA accredited facilities in Virginia for egregious Animal Welfare Act (AWA) violations. The violations the USDA sought to enforce included the drowning of a Parma Wallaby, instead of complying with proper veterinary and euthanasia requirements as well as housing a Spider Monkey in sub-freezing temperatures without proper shelter and failing to provide proper veterinary care for the animal's resulting injuries. This is just one example

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of the weak protections offered to captive wildlife under a ZAA accreditation.

The Legislature passed Minnesota's Regulated Animal Law to prevent the exact kinds of incidents that are common at ZAA accredited facilities and since 2005, incidents involving dangerous wild animals in Minnesota have significantly decreased. Exempting ZAA accredited facilities could put the public and animals at risk of unnecessary, and preventable, harm.

To uphold the integrity of Minnesota's zoos and to protect the public from unnecessary danger, we urge you to vote no on SF 4280.

Thank you for your consideration.

*Kathleen Schatzmann*

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