

March 25, 2022

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 Chair Westrom,

My name is Reese Frederickson and I am the county attorney in Pine County, Minnesota. I am also a board member with the Wildcat Sanctuary in Sandstone (also located in Pine County). I've always been interested in Minnesota law as it pertains to animal cruelty and welfare crimes. For instance, I co-authored the Animal Cruelty chapter in the Minnesota Judges Criminal Benchbook that is used throughout the state by judges and attorneys. I'm also on the planning committee for and a presenter at the yearly national Animal Cruelty Prosecution Conference.

Based on my experience prosecuting animal cruelty cases, I am writing to let you know of my concerns with SF 4280.

In 2005 Minnesota passed a law to restrict possession of bears, big cats and primates after a series of public safety incidents involving these species (including one in Pine County where a woman was mauled and killed by her pet tiger). This resulted in a significant decline in dangerous incidents. I am concerned that creating an exemption for facilities accredited by the Zoological Association of America (ZAA) will result in an increase in public safety problems in Minnesota, creating safety issues and burdens for our local law enforcement personnel, and putting significant costs on local jurisdictions.

The ZAA accredits poorly run roadside zoos and backyard menageries and if this bill passes, ZAA-accredited roadside zoos and private collections would no longer have to register with state authorities, alert authorities if their big cats, bears or primates escape, or comply with other state-mandated safety, animal care, and recordkeeping requirements for regulated animals.

People around the country have been injured by captive wild animals at ZAA-accredited facilities. ZAA-accredited facilities have also been cited by authorities for unsafe handling of animals, inadequate public safety barriers, animal escapes, inadequate veterinary care, and other issues. Unfortunately, when problems occur at these places, the costs are often borne by local authorities (rural counties such as Pine County have neither the money nor expertise to combat these issues; costs can easily run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars).

The law currently contains adequate exemptions for the Associations of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), bona fide wildlife sanctuaries, research facilities, licensed game farms, USDA licensed shows, and persons permitted by the commissioner of natural resources to possess captive wildlife. The AZA should not be confused with the ZAA - the AZA is a highly respected zoo trade organization with 6,000 professional members and 240 accredited facilities that ensure care for animals by knowledgeable and experienced professionals.

In sum, I hope that you will consider opposing the proposed ZAA exemption.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Reese Frederickson