



March 29, 2022

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

RE: Opposition to Agriculture Appropriations Amendment (SF 4019 A-1 DE Amendment) which amends the Minnesota Regulated Animals Law

Chair Westrom and Committee Members,

Animal Humane Society (AHS) opposes efforts to amend and weaken the Minnesota Regulated Animal Law 346.155. As the oldest and largest animal welfare organization in Minnesota, AHS has experienced first-hand the effects of a poorly regulated exotic animal industry. We do not want to go back to the days when rescue organizations such as ours had to deal with escaped or abused dangerous exotic animals.

Before the Regulated Animal Law was enacted, there were a series of incidents involving exotic animals in Minnesota that either threatened public safety or the welfare of animals. One example is an incidence that occurred in Racine, MN when a girl was grabbed and dragged by a tiger. Many similar incidents were handled by humane agents and law enforcement throughout the state. AHS's veteran Supervising Humane Agent, who has over 30 years' experience, regularly witnessed exotic animals living in appalling conditions. Due to these factors, AHS and the Minnesota law enforcement community supported the passage of this essential law.

Over the 16 years since the Minnesota Regulated Animal Law was passed, there has been a significant reduction in dangerous incidents involving tigers, lions, bears, and other exotic animals. This is good for public safety and the safety of law enforcement and humane agents. In fact, AHS's Supervising Humane Agent has reported he has not seized an exotic animal since the passage of this law.

An important factor contributing to the success of this law are the very limited exemptions in the law, such as for facilities accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). This exemption was codified into law in recognition of the importance of higher standards for these types of facilities based on the risks dangerous animals pose and the unique level of care required.

The proposed amendment to the Regulated Animal Law would weaken existing standards. Entities accredited by the Zoological Association of America (ZAA) have a poor track record due to ZAA's weaker standards and lax oversight. ZAA-accredited facilities have been cited for animal escapes, unsafe handling of animals, and numerous other issues. ZAA facilities would no longer be required to report the escape of restricted species to law enforcement—an essential tool used by law enforcement and humane agents to keep the community safe.

Existing standards for AZA accreditation are achievable and necessary for public safety and animal welfare. Local facilities, such as the Como Park Zoo and Conservatory, have successfully met AZA standards. In fact, nearly 240 facilities have AZA accreditation, demonstrating these standards can be met. Our existing law is working and efforts to weaken current accreditation requirements for exempt facilities create unnecessary risks to both people and animals. ***It is for these reasons Animal Humane Society opposes the A-1 DE Amendment to SF 4019 found in Article 3, Section 15 of the Agriculture Appropriations bill.***

Sincerely,

Janelle Dixon
President and CEO

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