

March 18, 2024

Representative Robert Craven, Chair
Rhode Island House Committee on Judiciary
Attn: Roberta DiMezza, Committee Clerk
HouseJudiciary@rilegislature.gov

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Re: VETERINARY SUPPORT for H. 7454, *Trade in Animal Fur Products Act*

Dear Chair Craven and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary,

On behalf of the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA), we are writing to express our strong support for H. 7454, a bill to prohibit the sale of new fur products in Rhode Island. HSVMA is an association of more than 7,000 veterinary medical professionals worldwide focused on the health and welfare of all animals, including those species raised for their fur.

As experts in the field of animal health and welfare, we recognize there are severe animal welfare deficiencies inherent in the fur trade, including the ways in which the animals are cruelly housed and killed. We also have serious concerns about disease transmission through susceptible fur-farmed animal populations, such as mink, foxes, and raccoon dogs, as well as the possibility of contagious disease spread between these animal species and humans. For these reasons, we support ending this archaic and inhumane industry and strongly endorse passage of H. 7454 a commonsense bill that includes reasonable exemptions such as for used fur products.

Inhumane Housing and improper Husbandry at Fur Farms

More than 100 million animals worldwide, including foxes, chinchillas, minks, raccoon dogs and rabbits, are killed for their fur every year. Most of these animals (around 85%) are raised in very small cage systems that fail to satisfy many of their most basic needs, particularly their need to display normal behaviors essential to their mental and physical well-being.

Investigations on fur farms worldwide, including those considered “certified” to maintain higher welfare standards, reveal distressing evidence of persistently poor welfare conditions. Species such as fox and mink retain their basic wild needs regardless of being bred and kept in captivity, and it is highly inaccurate for the fur industry to refer to an arctic fox bred on a fur farm as a ‘domesticated’ animal that has environmental and behavioral needs different from its wild relatives.

Wild animals on fur farms spend their lives in wire-floored cages thousands of times smaller than their natural territories. They are denied the opportunity to express natural behaviors such as hunting, digging, and swimming. They are often kept in unnatural social groups; for example, mink are forced to live in extremely close proximity to one another which would be highly unlikely in the wild. The contrived and inhumane living conditions on fur farms inevitably lead animals to suffer severe psychological distress. Instances of unproductive repetitive behaviors, a sign of

compromised psychological well-being, have been well-documented on fur farms, as have cannibalism, untreated wounds, foot deformities and eye infections.

Cruel Trapping of Fur-Bearers in the Wild and Inhumane Slaughter on Fur Farms

Other welfare deficiencies inherent in the fur industry include the trapping methods used to capture animals in the wild. Some species are targeted with crippling leg-hold traps which are not sanctioned by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) or the HSVMA. Once trapped, animals are often left to languish for long periods of time without food or water before they are killed. Meanwhile, fur factory farms crudely gas or even anally electrocute animals.

One Health Concerns for Disease Transmission through Fur Farming

During the recent global pandemic, the SARS CoV-2 virus, which causes COVID-19 in humans, spread through hundreds of fur farms in 11 countries – including the U.S. – and resulted in government-ordered killing of at least 20 million mink to try to stem the outbreak. Genetic analysis from some of these fur farms has shown that sick workers introduced SARS CoV-2 to mink and, at least in the Netherlands and Denmark, that mink had passed it back to fur farm workers. In addition, USDA-confirmed outbreaks on farms in Oregon, Utah, Wisconsin, and Michigan have similarly resulted in the deaths of thousands of mink.

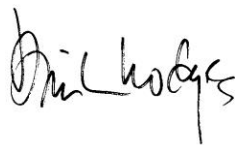
Given the structural design of fur farms SARS-CoV-2 can not only circulate on the farms but the farms could also spread the virus to wild mink and other species in the local environment, creating the potential for a reservoir for the disease. This creates a long-term risk of the virus recirculating--not only in mink, but in people as well. Based on all these factors, mink farms present a serious public health hazard in the United States.

Fashion Industry Turns to Fur Alternatives to Satisfy Consumer Demand

Consumer concern for animal welfare has already led many fashion brands to stop using animal fur once and for all. These companies recognize that contemporary alternatives to fur provide luxury, warmth, and style without animal cruelty. In 2018 alone, well-known brands such as Chanel, Coach, Burberry, Versace, and Donna Karan joined Gucci, Michael Kors, and Armani in announcing fur-free policies. Legislative bans help hasten and solidify this positive transition while driving the development of more humane alternatives to fur.

Rhode Island has a progressive history regarding animal welfare measures and--with your support of H. 7454--we hope it will soon include prohibiting the sale of new fur products in the Ocean State.

Sincerely,



Barbara Hodges, DVM, MBA
HSVMA Director, Advocacy & Outreach