

From: Mike Brown <communications@naturalfibersalliance.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 21, 2024 11:40 AM
To: House Judiciary Committee
Subject: Opposition H 7454
Attachments: Furmark Background.pdf; FCUSA Mink White Paper Feb 2024 V2(1).docx

Testimony of Mike Brown

Organization: Head of Communications and Public Affairs, Natural Fibers Alliance

Bill: H. 7454

Members of the House Judiciary Committee

Honorable members of the committee,

I am writing to provide my testimony on the proposed House Bill 7454, which aims to ban the retail sale of fur products in Rhode Island. We strongly oppose this bill and urge you to consider the following points before making a decision.

Firstly, we would like to address the issue of mink farming in the United States. It is important to note that reputable organizations such as the CDC, USDA, NVSL, and others have confirmed that U.S. mink pose no significant public health risk. Extensive research by the CDC has found no strong evidence linking mink to the spread of COVID-19 in humans. Furthermore, it has been over two years since the last mink farm COVID-19 outbreak in the United States. Additionally, there have been no avian influenza outbreaks on U.S. mink farms. Farms have mandatory reporting protocols in place for both COVID-19 and avian influenza, and they strictly adhere to the guidelines set by the CDC and USDA to prevent respiratory viruses. The farms also follow stringent biosecurity standards, covering various aspects such as the physical layout, incoming deliveries, farm employees, and farm visitors.

In terms of animal welfare standards, it is essential to highlight that more than 96% of mink pelts are produced on certified farms. These farms undergo third-party inspections to ensure compliance with the highest animal care standards. The certification program itself is peer-reviewed by PAACO, the organization that peer-reviews the major U.S. animal agriculture certification programs. The standards for mink farming are developed by experts in the field, including scientists, veterinarians, and animal welfare specialists. They cover all aspects of animal care, including nutrition, housing, biosecurity, veterinary care, and humane harvesting practices. It is important to emphasize that all farms euthanize their mink humanely, following the guidelines set by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). The housing provided to minks allows for natural behaviors, with snug nest boxes and larger pens that

promote activity. Furthermore, mink farming operates in full compliance with state, federal, and local laws, including environmental regulations.

In terms of the overview of U.S. mink farming, there are over 100 family-owned farms in 12 states (NOT Rhode Island), collectively producing 1.33 million pelts. The quality of U.S. mink fur is globally recognized, as it ranks in the top 5% in terms of prices. These family farms play a crucial role in creating jobs and injecting millions of dollars into local economies. It is also worth noting that mink fur is a durable and biodegradable material, aligning with efforts to promote sustainability.

The production practices in mink farming are responsible and environmentally conscious. Minks are raised on high-quality diets, provided with clean water, and receive necessary medical care. Additionally, mink farming contributes to reducing waste in the food industry by transforming food industry byproducts into mink feed. The pelts produced by mink farms are sold globally, and the remains are utilized for various purposes, such as compost, pet food, crab bait, and conditioners. The manure produced on these farms is also utilized as a crop fertilizer, contributing to sustainable agricultural practices.

It is crucial to consider that there are no mink farms in Rhode Island. Therefore, the proposed bill unfairly targets retailers and trappers who are not involved in mink farming. It is important to base legislative decisions on accurate information and avoid imposing unnecessary burdens on businesses.

Furthermore, banning natural fibers such as fur would have a negative impact on environmental sustainability efforts. Natural fibers provide a viable and biodegradable alternative to synthetic materials, which are associated with issues such as landfill waste, microplastics, overconsumption, and pollution. Fur products are long-lasting and can be reused, remodeled, and recycled, following a circular model that promotes sustainability. In contrast, synthetic fibers, which are commonly used in "fast fashion," contribute to pollution and consumer waste. Therefore, banning fur products would undermine current efforts to improve environmental sustainability.

Lastly, it is crucial to be aware of misinformation and exaggerated claims regarding mink farms and COVID-19. After some initial farm infections in the fall of 2020, the industry has achieved a vaccination rate of nearly 100% on certified mink farms. Leaders, including the Prime Minister of Denmark, have acknowledged and apologized for misleading the public on this issue. It is essential not to fall for misinformation and to make decisions based on evidence and facts.

In conclusion, we strongly oppose House Bill 7454, as it represents an overreach that unfairly targets Rhode Island small businesses. This bill does not serve the public interest and could have unintended consequences. Instead, I urge to consider alternative approaches that prioritize education, responsible farming practices, and animal welfare. Such alternatives have already been established, such as FURMARK which is a global certification and traceability system

that guarantees animal welfare and environmental standards are met across the entire natural fur supply chain.

We encourage you to question the motivations behind those advocating for this legislation with use of dated shock videos from outside of the US. It is important to ensure that decisions are made based on accurate information and a comprehensive understanding of the industry. Banning fur products may set a precedent that could lead to the prohibition of other natural fibers, such as leather, ugg boots, and down feather coats. Such actions could have far-reaching implications on various industries and livelihoods. Fur consumed in the US is made in the US.

We implore you to consider the broader impact of House Bill 7454 and its potential to undermine the economic contributions of the animal-use industry, destroy small businesses in Rhode Island, and hinder efforts to promote environmental sustainability.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Michael Brown
Natural Fibers Alliance
Head of Communications and Public Affairs

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)



Furmark® means certification and traceability

- Furmark® is the global certification and traceability system for natural fur that guarantees animal welfare and environmental standards.
- A mark of quality, assurance, and confidence.
- Furmark® products are traceable, verified, and have met globally-recognised standards.
- The system has been developed in close collaboration with major fashion groups and brands.

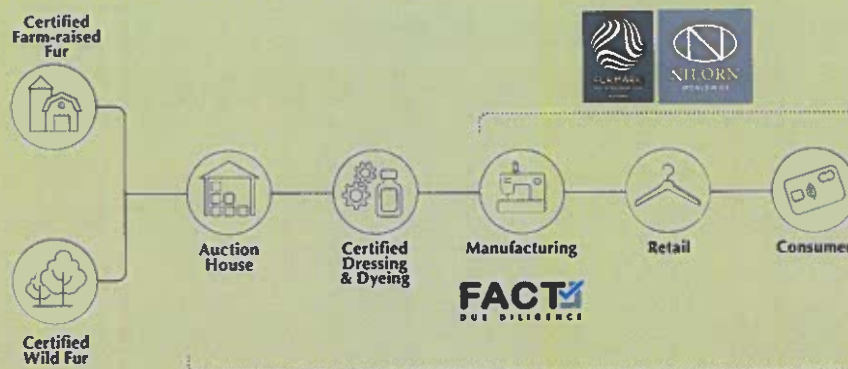
Natural fur is sustainable

- At the heart of Furmark® is a natural, sustainable, and biodegradable material.
- With outstanding durability, fur products can last a lifetime.
- Fur has a timeless quality and a unique look and feel.
- The material is highly regulated at international, national, and local levels.



How does Furmark® certification work?

Furmark® means consistent standards across the supply chain. Natural fur from leading animal welfare programmes is processed by certified dressers and dyers who are subject to third-party checks. Manufacturers record certified furs inside the ChainPoint traceability system, ensuring transparency across the supply chain.



Furmark® certified garments are traceable

Each Furmark® garment carries a unique label code which when entered onto the 'Trace Now' platform on furmark.com — provides full traceability details. This ensures you can buy certified furs with confidence.

Use the 'Trace Now' platform and unique label code to access:

- Fur type
- Fur origin
- Animal welfare certification programme
- Place of manufacture



furmark.com



Fur Commission USA

P.O. Box 513 Preston ID, 83263

(435) 915-6735

www.furcommission.com

Mink Farming in the US

Public Health and U.S. Farm-Raised Mink:

- CDC, USDA, NVSL, with others, confirm U.S. **mink pose no significant public health risk.**
- CDC found no strong evidence linking mink to COVID-19 spread in humans.
- The last US mink farm COVID-19 outbreak was over 2 years ago.
- No avian influenza outbreaks on U.S. mink farms.
- **Mandatory reporting protocols for COVID-19 or avian influenza on farms.**
- **All farms instructed to adhere CDC's One Health and USDA guidelines** to prevent respiratory viruses, including SARS-CoV-2 and Influenza.
- Certification has **biosecurity standards**, including: the physical layout, incoming deliveries, farm employees, and farm visitors.

Animal Welfare Standards

- More than 96% of mink pelts are produced on certified farms.
- **The certification program is peer-reviewed** by PAACO, the organization that peer-reviews the major U.S. animal agriculture certification programs.
- **Farms are third-party inspected** for compliance.
- Standards developed by experts: scientists, veterinarians, and animal welfare specialists.
- Animal care standards: nutrition, housing, biosecurity, veterinary care, and harvesting.
- All farms **euthanize their mink humanely with carbon monoxide**, following AVMA guidelines.
- Housing allows natural behaviors: snug nest boxes and larger pens for activity.
- Farming adheres to state, federal, and local laws, including environmental rules.

U.S. Mink Farming Overview

- Over **100 family farms** in 12 states, producing 1.33 million pelts.
- Globally Recognized Quality: Top 5% in global prices.
- All farms are **family-owned**.
- Creates jobs and injects millions into local economies.
- Mink fur is durable and **biodegradable**.

Production Practices

- Breeding in early spring, litters in late spring, harvest in fall.
- Raised on high-quality diets, clean water, and necessary medical care.
- **Transforms food industry byproducts into mink feed**, reducing waste.
- Pelts sold globally; remains used for compost, pet food, crab bait, conditioners, etc.
- Manure is used as a crop fertilizer.