



Fur Commission USA

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Written Testimony of the Fur Commission USA Opposing HB 5447 Before the Rhode Island State Legislature Hearing Date: March 4, 2025

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

My name is **Challis Hobbs**, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Fur Commission USA, the national trade association representing mink farmers and the U.S. fur industry. We oppose HB 5447, which seeks to ban the sale, possession, and trade of fur products in Rhode Island.

HB 5447 is Based on Misleading Claims About Animal Welfare

U.S. mink farms operate under some of the most stringent animal welfare regulations in agriculture. Over **96% of American mink pelts come from farms certified under a science-based program peer-reviewed by the Professional Animal Auditor Certification Organization (PAACO)**—the same organization that oversees animal welfare audits for the nation's largest livestock industries.

These farms undergo regular **third-party inspections** to ensure compliance with animal care standards, including **nutrition, housing, biosecurity, veterinary care, and humane harvesting methods that follow American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) guidelines**. Farmers work closely with veterinarians and animal scientists to uphold the highest standards in animal husbandry.

HB 5447 falsely portrays fur farming as cruel, ignoring the reality that U.S. mink farms meet or exceed established welfare standards, with **housing designed to accommodate natural behaviors**.

Mink Farming is Environmentally Sustainable—Nothing is Wasted

Natural fur is one of the most eco-friendly and biodegradable materials in fashion. Unlike synthetic alternatives made from petroleum-based plastics that contribute to microplastic pollution, **real fur decomposes naturally**. Fur garments are **long-lasting, often passed down for generations, and can endure for decades**—a stark contrast to fast fashion's disposable nature.

Mink farming operates on a **zero-waste model**, ensuring every part of the animal is used while contributing to a sustainable agricultural system:

- **Reduces Food Waste:** Mink farms **upcycle over a billion pounds of food industry byproducts** annually, repurposing materials that would otherwise end up in landfills as high-quality mink feed.
- **Sustainable Fur:** Unlike synthetic fur, which sheds microplastics into the environment, **natural fur biodegrades without harming ecosystems**.
- **Agricultural Benefits:** Mink manure is **used as organic fertilizer for crops**, and processed byproducts are repurposed for **compost, pet food, crab bait, and leather conditioners**.

This **closed-loop system** supports sustainability, reduces waste, and aligns with responsible environmental practices.

HB 5447 Unjustly Targets American Farmers, Hurts Jobs, and Fuels Extremist Attacks

While this bill may seem symbolic, it **unjustly gives a black eye to responsible U.S. mink farmers**—hardworking rural families who follow strict welfare and environmental standards. By banning fur sales, Rhode Island’s legislature would be **validating activist misinformation** and fueling the narrative used by extremist groups that seek to **harass, vandalize, and terrorize American farmers**.

Mink farms across the country have been repeatedly **targeted by animal rights extremists**, leading to **property destruction, animal harm, and direct threats against farm families**. We have seen activists **trespass onto private farms, destroy property, cut fences, and release thousands of mink into the wild—where the vast majority die within 24-48 hours from exposure**. These attacks are not just against businesses but against **rural American families who are being threatened and harassed for simply earning an honest living**.

The proposed ban will also **harm businesses** by negatively impacting Rhode Island’s retailers that sell **legally produced fur garments, outerwear, and accessories**. These businesses would face **loss of revenue and inventory devaluation**, forcing them to shift to **less sustainable synthetic alternatives** that contribute to pollution and plastic waste.

Furthermore, mink farming in the U.S. supports **over 100 family farms in 12 states, producing 1 million pelts annually and injecting millions of dollars into rural economies**. These farms rank among the **top 5% in global pelt quality and pricing**, further demonstrating their **excellence in animal care and sustainable production**.

Banning fur sales does not just impact mink farmers—it sets a **dangerous precedent** that could extend to other animal-based industries like **leather, wool, and down**.

HB 5447 Ignores Public Health Authorities and Scientific Evidence

HB 5447 does nothing to improve public health or safety—in fact, it **ignores the findings of leading public health and agricultural authorities**.

U.S. Mink Farming is Not a Public Health Risk

U.S. mink farms operate under strict **biosecurity and disease prevention protocols**.

- **CDC, USDA, and NVSL confirm** that U.S. mink pose **no significant public health risk**.
- The **CDC found no strong evidence** linking mink to **COVID-19 spread** in humans.
- **There have been no avian influenza outbreaks** on U.S. mink farms.
- **Mandatory disease reporting protocols** are in place and farms have been instructed to adhere to **CDC’s One Health and USDA guidelines** to prevent disease spread.
- U.S. mink farms follow **certified biosecurity standards**, covering **farm layout, deliveries, employee safety, and visitor restrictions** to mitigate any potential risks.

Despite these **clear findings from public health authorities**, HB 5447 **wrongly assumes** that mink farming poses a threat—when in reality, it is a **certified, biosecure industry that operates under science-backed health and safety standards**.

Fur Use is a Personal and Cultural Choice

For centuries, fur has played an essential role in **indigenous traditions, luxury fashion, and functional outerwear**. Consumers should have the right to choose **natural, sustainable products** rather than being forced to rely on synthetic, petroleum-based alternatives. A government-imposed ban undermines **personal freedoms and consumer choice**.

Conclusion

HB 5447 is based on **misinformation** and will **harm farmers and small businesses, eliminate jobs, and promote synthetic alternatives that worsen plastic pollution**. U.S. mink farms uphold **animal welfare standards, reduce waste, and contribute to sustainable agriculture**.

We strongly urge the legislature to reject HB 5447 and **support consumer choice, sustainability, and responsible farming**.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,
Challis Hobbs
Executive Director
Fur Commission USA