



March 12, 2025

Representative Robert E. Craven, Chair  
House Judiciary Committee  
Rhode Island General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: SUPPORT for H.5447, Trade in Farmed Animal Fur Products**

Dear Chair Craven and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Humane World for Animals, the fellow undersigned organizations, and our supporters throughout Rhode Island, I submit the following comments in strong support of House Bill 5447, Trade in Farmed Animal Fur Products. We are also in support of a proposed amendment that will exempt fishing lures and products used to make fishing lures, as we seek to find compromise and common ground with Rhode Island's anglers. As we discuss below, this commonsense bill is necessary to eliminate cruel and harmful fur products from the marketplace.

**I. Scope and exemptions of H.5447**

This legislation will make it unlawful to sell new fur products, including clothing, accessories and home décor, from animals raised in captivity for their fur, aka fur factory farms. It seeks to remove Rhode Island's participation in the unnecessary fur trade which is one of the cruelest and least regulated remaining animal industries in the world. Animals in fur factory farms are not protected by state or federal animal welfare laws or humane slaughter laws like other farm animals, as they are not raised for consumption. Investigations on fur farms around the world have consistently shown one thing in common—extreme animal suffering.

This bill includes sensible exemptions. It does not apply to the following items:

- Used fur products
- Fur products obtained through legal hunting and trapping
- Fishing lures and products used to make fishing lures (per the proposed amendment)
- Raw fur pelts
- Loose animal hair products (e.g., felt hats, paint brushes)
- Leather products
- Products from common livestock like cows, sheep, goats, alpacas, camels, buffalo, boars, etc.

**II. Purpose of H.5447**

**1. Ending the sale of new fur products is beneficial for animals.** The vast majority of new fur products come from fur factory farms, where wild animals spend their entire lives in cramped, wire-floored cages, solely for fashion. Annually, tens of millions of animals, including foxes, mink and raccoon dogs,

are killed for their fur. Since animals held in fur farms are not raised for consumption, the industry is typically not subject to animal welfare or humane slaughter laws, either in the U.S. or overseas. These wild animals are deprived of the ability to engage in natural behaviors like swimming, digging, and running. The living conditions on fur farms often drive animals to engage in self-mutilation, pacing, and other behaviors that clearly demonstrate their suffering.<sup>i</sup> Investigations across the world, including a recent rescue of hundreds of animals on an Ohio fur farm,<sup>ii</sup> show animals living in horrific conditions and neglect. Many are found with open and infected wounds, and others are found dead left to decay in cages next to other animals, and there are even reported instances of cannibalism.

The sale of new fur products in Rhode Island and throughout the U.S. help drive the demand that fuels this cruelty. According to 2023 data from the globally-recognized data source Observatory of Economic Complexity (OE), the U.S. is the third largest importer of fur apparel (\$165 million), behind Russia (\$802 million) and South Korea (\$214 million).

**2. Ending the sale of new fur products is beneficial for public health.** The processes of tanning and dying fur involve toxic, carcinogenic chemicals, such as formaldehyde, which are used to prevent the skins from decaying.<sup>iii</sup> The U.S. EPA has previously fined six fur processing plants for causing high levels of pollution and for using solvents in fur dressing that "may cause respiratory problems, and are listed as possible carcinogens".<sup>iv</sup> These chemicals can leach into waterways, posing a broad risk to public health. In fact, fur products can contain such high levels of toxic substances and carcinogenic chemicals that the Italian Ministry of Health ordered the withdrawal of certain children's fur clothing from the market in 2016 as they exceeded safety standards and were deemed 'dangerous products'.<sup>v</sup>

Moreover, confining wild animals in close, unsanitary quarters with no monitoring for infectious diseases poses a serious biosecurity risk. Mink on hundreds of fur factory farms in 12 countries across Europe and North America – including four U.S. states– have tested positive for SARS-CoV-2. These fur farms act as mutation hubs, allowing SARS-CoV-2 to mutate on mink fur farms and spread to humans. Wild mink in vicinity of these farms have also been infected with the COVID variant found in farmed mink. Additionally, foxes and raccoon dogs on fur farms were detected with the SARS coronavirus, risking transmission to wild populations. In wildlife markets in China, both foxes and raccoon dogs have tested positive for SARS-CoV-2.

Now, fur-farmed mink, foxes, and raccoon dogs are testing positive for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), sparking similar concerns over the potential transmission of the disease to humans.<sup>vi</sup> Within these fur farms, there's a risk of disease spreading through novel mammal-to-mammal transmission. Researchers are calling fur farms "the perfect petri dish for a future pandemic" in reference to HPAI.<sup>vii</sup> In Finland, the public health threat of HPAI has led to the culling of hundreds of thousands of fur-farmed animals. Moreover, HPAI is now spreading throughout U.S. commercial bird and dairy cow populations, drawing imminent concern about its potential presence in U.S. fur farms.

**3. Ending the sale of new fur products is beneficial for the environment.** According to a recently published report by carbon footprint experts, the fur industry, including the manufacturing of fur products, has the largest negative environmental impact of any material used for fashion, in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, waste runoff, and toxicity.<sup>viii</sup> The water consumption for fur production is extraordinarily high, being 104 times more than for acrylic, 91 times more than polyester, and 5 times more than cotton. Consequently, advertising standards committees in France, the UK, Denmark, Holland, Finland, and Italy have ruled advertisements promoting fur as environmentally-friendly as "false and misleading." In 2018, France's advertising authority stated, "Numerous reliable reports show that the production of fur is extremely cruel and polluting, and that the final product contains toxic substances."

### **III. Impacts of H.5447 on Rhode Island's residents and businesses**

Ending the sale of new fur products in Rhode Island aligns with the growing national and international sentiment against the fur industry, recognizing the inherent cruelty and environmental degradation. According to recent polling, **upwards of 70% of Rhode Island voters support this legislation**, including Democrats and Republicans alike.<sup>ix</sup>

This bill will have minimal impact on Rhode Island businesses that sell fur products. There are just a handful of retailers in the state that still sell any fur. Yet, most retailers that sell new fur products stock only a limited range of these items, and typically seasonally, such as fur-pom hats or fur-trimmed gloves which can easily be substituted with non-fur alternatives.

The entire state of California has already banned these products along with many other communities across the U.S. Internationally, Israel passed a fur product sales ban in 2021 and the UK and Switzerland are currently considering similar legislation. Nearly 30 other European countries have passed bans or restrictions on fur factory farming. Most fashion brands and retailers are now fur-free due to growing consumer demand for more humane and environmentally conscious products. Legislation to end the sale of new fur products in Rhode Island will contribute to this effort and align with the desire of our citizens to eliminate new fur products from the marketplace.

In areas where similar bans on new fur products have passed, fur retailers remain in business. They continue to provide fur-related services such as storage and cleaning, sell used fur products, and transition to faux fur options which are increasingly made of sustainable, bio-based materials. With growing awareness of the fur industry's inherent cruelty and the advent of innovative, cruelty-free, bio-based faux fur alternatives, retailers can adopt more ethical options. Additionally, Rhode Island's fur retailers can sell products from legally hunted and trapped animals.

For these critical and compelling reasons, we urge the committee to vote in favor of H.5447. By passing this legislation, Rhode Island can do its part to end the state's role in this needless animal suffering. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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Humane World for Animals

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Director of Legislative Affairs  
Social Compassion in Legislation

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<sup>i</sup> E.g., Pickett, H. and Harris, S. The Case Against Fur Factory Farming: A Scientific Review of Animal Welfare Standards and Welfur, Respect for Animals, 24 (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.furfreealliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Case-against-fur-farming.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> The Humane Society of the United States, 2025, Coyotes, foxes among hundreds of animals saved from fur and urine farm in Ohio. Retrieved from <https://www.humanesociety.org/blog/animals-rescued-fur-urine-farm-ohio>.

<sup>iii</sup> Wheeler, D. A. H., H. Hettige, P. Martin, and M. Singh, The Industrial Pollution Projection System. <https://doi.org/10.1596/1813->

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9450-1431.

<sup>iv</sup> The Guardian, 3013, Is the fur trade sustainable? Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/sustainable-fashion-blog/is-fur-trade-sustainable>.

<sup>v</sup> Fur Free Alliance, 2016, European Commission withdraws children's wear with toxic fur. Retrieved from <https://www.furfreealliance.com/european-commission-withdraws-childrens-wear-with-toxic-fur-collars/>.

<sup>vi</sup> Sidik, S.M. Bird flu outbreak in mink sparks concern about spread in people, Nature (January 2023). Retrieved from <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-00201-2>.

<sup>vii</sup> Georgia Hulme, Virus in Furs: How fashion-fueled mink farms are the perfect petri dish for a future pandemic (October 2023). The Pathologist. Retrieved from <https://thepathologist.com/outside-the-lab/virus-in-furs>.

<sup>viii</sup> Humane Society International, 2023, Fur industry accused of greenwashing as new report reveals carbon footprint of fur fashion far higher than other materials. Retrieved from <https://www.hsi.org/news-resources/fur-industry-accused-of-greenwashing-as-new-report-reveals-carbon-footprint-of-fur-fashion-far-higher-than-other-materials/>.

<sup>ix</sup> Remington Research Group, 2023, Rhode Island Public Opinion, February 2023. Retrieved from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PqzSCtaKsfAdML6ROGeB6dqxZsu-lzIf/view>.