



June 8, 2023

RE: Ordinance No. 2023-130: Amending City Code Regarding Exotic and Wild Animals

Dear Mayor Stoney and Members of the Richmond City Council:

On behalf of the responsible pet care community, we respectfully request that you revise the current draft of Ordinance No. 2023-130, regarding the addition of a new section numbered 4-401, concerning wild and exotic animals.

As the advocacy voice of the responsible pet care community, the Pet Advocacy Network represents the interests and expertise of retailers, companion animal suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, pet owners, and others involved in the many aspects of pet care across the United States. Our association promotes animal well-being and responsible pet ownership, fosters environmental stewardship, and ensures healthy pets' availability through our work at the local, state, and federal levels. We routinely advocate for legislative and regulatory proposals to advance the public interest in protecting public health and the safety and health of companion animals. As such, we offer unmatched experience on legislative efforts to verify and certify the health and well-being of all pets from the time they are born until they are taken home to be part of their families.

We applaud and appreciate your efforts to keep Richmond safe while also protecting wild animals. We agree that certain animals – lions, tigers, or leopards, for example – require a level of care, management, and security that is well beyond that which the responsible pet-owning public and serious hobbyists can provide. This is an issue we know you take seriously and have approached thoughtfully.

Because of that, we are hopeful that we can collaborate to make two revisions that will protect public safety and responsible pet ownership.

The first revision we are suggesting pertains to venomous or poisonous reptiles or amphibians. Currently, the language reads as “any venomous or poisonous reptiles or amphibians.” This language is incredibly broad and could restrict the kinds of pets that some responsible pet owners may seek to own.

For instance, a serious hobbyist may be interested in keeping a technically venomous snake like the western hognose, whose venom is not medically equivalent and is equivalent to a bee sting, but, due to this broad language, would not be able to.

That is why we recommend adding the “medically significant” qualifier – making the sentence read “...medically significant venomous or poisonous reptile or amphibian.”

This would protect public health and safety and continue to allow responsible hobbyists and pet owners the freedom of informed choice.

Additionally, we would recommend that rather than listing out specific mammals that may be owned, the city use “those small mammals bred in captivity as or for the purpose of being companion animals.”

1615 Duke Street, Suite 100
Alexandria, VA 22314
202.452.1525 | info@petadvocacy.org
[Petadvocacy.org](https://petadvocacy.org)



A list like the one that is currently included creates a whitelist, which unfortunately is something we have seen create more problems than solve them. By wording the allowed mammals as “those small mammals bred in captivity for the purpose of being companion animals” or in similar terminology rather than listing specific species, we can achieve the goal of regulation while still allowing responsible pet owners to choose the pet that is the best suited for them and their experience level.

All of us in the responsible pet care community do not just care about animals; we provide care for them daily—and we are dedicated to ensuring that appropriate care of animals is the primary focus of any law or regulation.

We appreciate your consideration and would welcome the opportunity to work together to find ways to meaningfully ensure the health and safety of companion animals while continuing to foster the human-animal bond.

Sincerely,

Alyssa Miller-Hurley
Senior Director of Government Affairs

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