



Dear Councilmembers,

My name is Heidi Crosky and I am reaching out to you on behalf of the Virginia Animal Owners Alliance regarding the proposed ordinance to ban exotic pets. The proposal portrays Virginia as a type of wild west devoid of any restraints when it comes to animal ownership. This is simply not true.

Virginia already has MANY laws/regulations in place in regards to wild and exotic animals. Private menageries of exotics are not permitted. Those who choose to own the majority of the warm-blooded exotic mammals must be licensed at both the State and Federal level. They are required to maintain proper facilities and provide educational programs. They also must submit annual reports to the Department of Wildlife Resources. The proposed ordinance ignores all of this and leaves many questions.

For example, the proposal ignores the reality of many bird owners. It states that "legally imported birds" will be exempt, but fails to recognize the fact that many pet parrots live for decades. Owners often do not know the history of their pet or lack documented proof. How will this part of the ordinance be enforced? When did the city become this interested in pet birds? Why are they so interested now?

In regards to primates, the State is already taking precautions. Under 2VAC5-141-130 you will find the entry requirements and the protocols that are already in place. These facts need to be central to the current conversation.

If there are concerns about certain animals, a ban is not the answer. In addition, the grandfathering amendment that has been added to the proposal for venomous or poisonous reptiles and amphibians is proof that a registration process is possible as a permanent solution, yet unwanted. Pets and owners deserve better than this.

There's been a lot of hype lately about exotics after the release of Tiger King. It's easy to jump on the bandwagon and try to stereotype what you don't understand. But for just a moment forget about Tiger King. Think of the people like Marlin Perkins, Jim Fowler, Joan Embury, Jack Hanna, and Steve Irwin who inspired people to love and appreciate the natural world. Their work sparked an interest in children around this country and the globe who now live and work with these species. It may not be the lifestyle you would choose, but these animals bring a lot of joy to a lot of people!

There are many pressing issues facing the city right now. Exotic pets are not one of them. Please take the time to form a stakeholder group to address the needs of everyone in your community before passing an arbitrary ban. Please find a way to preserve a pathway for ownership in Richmond.

Sincerely,

Heidi Crosky
Virginia Animal Owners Alliance
276-637-6652
www.virginiaanimalownersalliance.com