February 19, 2024

Representative Judy Aron, Chair
House Commitee on Environment and Agriculture
The General Court of New Hampshire
107 North Main St
Concord, NH

Re: Oppositional testimony – NH House Bill 1325-FN

Chair Aron, Vice Chair Creighton, and members of the House Committee on Environment and Agriculture,

As one of the region's foremost zoological center for conservation, animal health and wellbeing, Zoo New England respectfully requests that members of the New Hampshire House of Representatives **reject House Bill 1325-FN, which would allow the private ownership of small-tailed monkeys, raccoons, foxes, otters, skunks, and kangaroos. It is critically important to understand the dangers of keeping these *wild* animals as pets, particularly concerning public safety, human health, and animal wellbeing.**

Unlike domestic species, the animals permitted as pets under HB 1325-FN are wild and have lived for thousands of years without the direct influence of humans. This means they are evolutionarily hardwired for survival in complex and wild environments, regardless of whether individuals were raised in captivity. While cute as babies, these species undergo considerable growth and development for life in the wild, separate from humans. It is very challenging and costly to construct humane environments for wild animals, especially social species. Most of the animals included in HB 1325-FN live in social groups that serve as support systems for an individual's survival and general wellbeing. Being separated from these groups and deprived of habitat that supports innate behaviors and needs can create heightened stress resulting in aggression.

Of concern is the private ownership of primates, referred to as "small-tailed monkeys" in the proposed legislation. Primates have never been domesticated. Primates have group social needs that cannot be adequately provided when kept as pets. Familial relationships are also critically important. Primates have long infancy and juvenile development periods, requiring maternal and extended familial care. It is important for their development not to separate individuals from their neonatal group. When raised by humans outside of the proper social setting, the resulting ill-

adapted behaviors render individuals unable to rehabilitate back to their natal or social groups. As they mature, the primate's natural behavior causes them to become more disruptive and potentially aggressive to their hosts and visitors. It is common for owners to attempt to mitigate the danger of primate aggression through invasive interventions, such as teeth extraction and castration.

Gone is the cute little, tractable baby. It is often at this stage that private owners look for other homes for their primates. Unfortunately, because they are not candidates for rehabilitation into a primate social group, there is no place for them to go. They are often abandoned or set up to live their lives in cages that do not meet the minimum standards of their need for space, stability and enrichment. The same can be said for the other species permitted as pets under HB 1325-FN. Removing baby animals from wild neonatal groups may make them more manageable for the short term, but as they grow and mature, these wild animals become increasingly ill-suited to life with humans.

When wild animals are privately owned, without regulation, the associated threats to human health and public safety, as well as the potential impact of release on native flora and fauna must be considered. There is an extensive body of research on the harmful zoonotic diseases, infections, and parasites carried by wild animals. As defined by the World Health Organization, zoonoses refer to "any disease or infection that is naturally transmissible from vertebrate animals to humans". Over 70% of emerging human diseases around the world are zoonotic, meaning they can be traced to wild animals. Wild animals permitted as pets under HB 1325-FN are potential vectors for many zoonotic infections including tuberculosis, gastroenteritis, rabies, pneumonia, Hepatitis-A, measles, and hemorrhagic fever. As with many health risks, young children, pregnant women, the immunocompromised, and the elderly are most vulnerable to zoonoses, especially when wild animals are kept as private pets.

Our close genetic relationship with other primates (including "small-tailed monkeys") makes the risk of disease transfer between humans and primates considerably high. Infection risks are highest when there is frequent physical contact. This is why strict bio-security protocols are in place at all institutions accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). Such protocols require wearing masks, gowns or specialized clothing, goggles, and gloves when handling wild animals under anesthesia and/or cleaning habitats. The pathogens that can be passed from nonhuman primates to humans and vice versa include bacteria, fungi, parasites, and viruses. Disease causing organisms may be spread by bites, scratches, handling animals or their tissues, airborne transmission of aerosols and droplets, ingestion, and arthropod vectors (fleas, ticks, flies, and mites). **Nonhuman primates can carry and transmit diseases without any visible signs of infection.**

Raccoons and skunks are known carriers of the rabies virus, an infection that causes deadly brain inflammation. There is no licensed or approved rabies vaccine for raccoons or skunks. Raccoons can also shed Leptospirosis, an infectious bacterial disease, in their urine and other secretions.

Exposure of this bacteria to open wounds or orally can cause serious infection in humans. Raccoons also carry a very dangerous round worm parasite (Baylisascarius procyonis) that attacks the human central nervous system. As for otters, Leptospirosis, parvovirus, and brucellosis are just a sample of the zoonotic infections they are known to carry and transmit. Beyond threats to human health, many of these diseases can also afflict domestic pets and livestock/farm animals.

Lastly, we are deeply troubled by the scientifically meaningless reference to "small-tailed primates" in the proposed legislation. This undefined term is so vague as to render the bill unenforceable. What are "small-tailed primates"? What does "small" mean when monkeys can range in size from a few ounces to well over 60 pounds? Having asked several of my colleagues and our veterinarian at the zoo, we can only guess the meaning of such an indistinct "categorization". Regardless, body size **does not** alter the threat of zoonotic disease transmission between humans and primates. There is extensive documentation of zoonoses in small-bodied monkeys like the macaques, capuchins, and marmosets. All primates have the capacity to spread dangerous diseases *and* inflict severe physical harm. Children are disproportionately victims of bites and injuries from small-medium sized primates. Whether this is caused by the animal's assertion of dominance or due to a lack of appropriate safeguards, pet primates should be outlawed.

Given the numerous risks to human health and safety and the unsuitability of these species for private ownership, we respectfully request the Committee on Environment and agriculture reject NH House Bill 1325-FN. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Cynthia Mead
Executive Vice President of External Affairs

ZOO NEW ENGLAND
Franklin Park Zoo • Stone Zoo

Phone: 781-438-9515
1 Franklin Park Road | Boston, MA 02121
zoonewengland.org

Zoo New England's mission is to inspire people to protect and sustain the natural world for future generations by creating fun and engaging experiences that integrate wildlife and conservation programs, research, and education. AZA accredited.