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**Testimony for HB 251**  
**Relative to allowing the ownership of certain squirrels and raccoons**  
**House Environment and Agriculture Committee**  
**February 19, 2025**

Dear Chairman Aron and Members of the Committee,

The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (the Department), Division of Public Health Services (DPHS) is providing information relative to HB 251, *allowing the ownership of certain squirrels and raccoons*. If enacted, the legislation would amend RSA 207:14 to allow raccoons and gray squirrels to be possessed as companion animals without a permit from the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department if a wildlife rehabilitation facility makes the determination that the animal cannot survive in the wild and such animal is up to date on any vaccines required.

If enacted, HB 251 potentially increases the risk of rabies to humans and domestic animals. Rabies is a fatal disease in humans and is usually the result of a bite from an infected and symptomatic animal. The virus is found in the infected animal's saliva. After a bite, the virus travels from the site of infection along a person's nervous system to the brain resulting in a central nervous system infection known as encephalitis. Once a human or animal develops rabies symptoms, there is no cure and no treatment resulting in death nearly 100% of the time.

As there are no approved vaccines for rabies in raccoons or squirrels, should these companion animals be exposed and infected with rabies, they may also infect humans or domestic animals.

Because rabies circulates in New Hampshire and worldwide, and because of the serious consequences of infection in both humans and domestic animals, the Department wants the committee to be aware of the potential increase in risk of exposure of this fatal disease in our state should HB251 be enacted.

The Department is happy to address any questions that you may have regarding this legislation.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Colleen M. Smith".

Colleen Smith, MS  
Chief, Bureau of Infectious Disease Control