

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 27, 2020

Kevin Shea
Administrator
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
4700 River Rd.
Riverdale, MD 20737

Dear Administrator Shea,

We write to convey our serious concerns with the current enforcement of standards under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA), which have come to the attention of the general public with the airing of the recent Netflix series “Tiger King”. Joined by the co-chairs of the Congressional Animal Protection Caucus and the House co-leads the Big Cat Public Safety Act (H.R. 1380), we wish to ensure that the well-being of animals regulated under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) remains a top priority for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

This documentary series, which focuses on a number of animal parks who are unaccredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, has shone an unusually bright and unflattering spotlight on facilities that are in clear violation of the Animal Welfare Act. At multiple points during the series, individuals employed by these unaccredited zoos openly mock the USDA inspection process and flagrantly violate AWA regulations on camera. These instances are significant examples of the need for aggressive enforcement of USDA regulations and the importance of putting animal welfare and public safety first.

“Tiger King” has drawn serious attention because of the outrageous and unethical behavior displayed by the owners of these facilities. Many of the exhibitors featured on this series continue to have their licenses renewed, despite numerous documented violations of federal law. People with a history of AWA violations must not have their licenses renewed, especially without increased scrutiny. We urge your agency to issue the final rule eliminating automatic license renewals and requiring licensees to demonstrate compliance before receiving a new license.

The massive public attention to “Tiger King” has demonstrated that there is substantial interest among Americans in holding animal abusers accountable, and we believe the federal government must use this moment to do just that. As we continue our work in Congress to strengthen protections for animals, we urge your agency to uphold those that are already federal law. We stand ready to assist and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress

/s/
Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress

/s/
Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

/s/
Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/
Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

/s/
Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

/s/
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

/s/
Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

/s/
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

/s/
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

/s/
Susan Wild
Members of Congress

/s/
Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

/s/
Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress

/s/
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

/s/
Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

/s/
Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

/s/
Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

/s/
Matt Gaetz
Member of Congress

/s/
Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

/s/
Colin Z. Allred
Member of Congress

/s/
Joe Neguse
Member of Congress

/s/
Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

/s/
Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress

/s/
Fred Upton
Member of Congress

/s/
Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress

/s/
Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

/s/
Deb Haaland
Member of Congress

/s/
Susan A. Davis
Member of Congress

/s/
Dina Titus
Member of Congress

/s/

Jason Crow
Member of Congress

/s/

Bill Foster
Member of Congress

/s/

Guy Reschenthaler
Member of Congress

/s/

André Carson
Member of Congress

/s/

Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

/s/

Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

/s/

Donald S. Beyer, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/

Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress

/s/

Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress

/s/

Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress

/s/

Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress

/s/

Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress

/s/

Cindy Axne
Member of Congress

/s/

Scott H. Peters
Member of Congress

/s/

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

/s/

Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress

/s/

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

/s/

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

/s/

Josh Harder
Member of Congress

/s/

Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

/s/

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress