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
Rashida Tlaib  
Member of Congress

Joe Neguse  
Member of Congress

Vicente Gonzalez  
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal  
Member of Congress

Derek Kilmer  
Member of Congress

Ayanna Pressley  
Member of Congress

Fred Upton  
Member of Congress

Ann McLane Kuster  
Member of Congress

Tulsi Gabbard  
Member of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee  
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress

Matt Gaetz  
Member of Congress

Deb Haaland  
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress

Susan A. Davis  
Member of Congress

Colin Z. Allred  
Member of Congress

Dina Titus  
Member of Congress
/s/
Josh Harder
Member of Congress

/s/
Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

/s/
Julia Brownley
Member of Congress