

March 22, 2021

Testimony of Brittini Davis, DVM
in Support of H.B. 2737

As an advocate for the animals, I thank the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee for this opportunity for me to submit testimony in support of H.B. 2737 from a couple of states away. I am a small animal veterinarian practicing as chief of staff of Edwardsville Pet Hospital in Edwardsville, Illinois. My friend Sadina Scott, the Kansas State Representative for the HSVMA, contacted me regarding this legislation knowing I vehemently oppose the general public owning dangerous exotic animals, including non-human primates and wolves. I completed an internship as a zookeeper for the great apes at the St. Louis Zoo and have testified on an animal cruelty case involving a wolf hybrid. I will highlight the zoonotic risks, discuss some safety risks, and discuss animal welfare concerns with the general public owning wild animals.

When I was a zookeeper for the Great Apes, we were asked to stay at home if we were ill. If we even sneezed or coughed, we were asked to wear a mask (this was pre-COVID). The reasons for these precautions were the vast number of infectious diseases shared between humans and non-human primates. Sharing much of the same DNA means we have several similar anatomical and physiological features. For this reason, non-human primates are used as models in studies for human medicine. There are dozens of bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites that humans can contract from working with non-human primates or that the non-human primates can contract from the humans. It is in the best interest for the safety of the health of the general public and of these precious animals that their husbandry and care be restricted to AZA, ZAA, or USDA facilities.

At my first hospital of practice, I had a case of a hybrid wolf/shepherd dog that had been chased and shot in the name of vigilante justice. This poor wild creature was raised as a house pet. When he escaped, some of the neighborhood men chased him down with shotguns, shooting in a residential area, further putting human lives at risk. I testified on behalf of the canine, showing evidence of wounds for animal cruelty charges, but was glad that the outcome of the case included sending this hybrid animal to a wolf sanctuary. It is far too common to hear of cases like these, where privately owned wild animals get loose and the animals and sometimes humans end up getting hurt.

Finally, these wild animals have advanced husbandry and social needs that cannot be fulfilled by the general public. Without having other members of the same species for normal social hierarchy and interaction, having a non-human primate, a wolf, or any wild animal as a pet creates a ticking time bomb for a justified outburst from the animal. Despite an owners' best efforts, they fall short of what that animal could have at a regulated facility, zoo, or sanctuary.

I urge you to pass SB 269, banning private ownership of wolves and primates in Kansas. For the health, the safety, and the well-being of these animals and of humans, this legislation is needed. The care of these animals should be left to associations that work with conservation

and species survival programs and that undergo the proper training and have more oversight than can ever be possible with them being privately owned.