



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 5324 (AAC Child Safety by Restricting the Placement of Leghold Traps)

Testimony by: Laura Simon, Field Director, Urban Wildlife Program
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Committee: Joint Committee on the Environment
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Dear Honorable Members of the Environment Committee,

On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the nation's largest animal protection organization with over 165,000 members and constituents in Connecticut, we offer this testimony in SUPPORT of H.B. 5324.

This bill affords protective provisions and reporting requirements that have become necessary for protecting animals and children alike.

In the past few months alone, our organization was contacted about 7 cases in various parts of the country where dogs and cats fell victim to leghold or body crushing traps, and the outcomes were tragic. In one case a man had to kill his dog with his own hands rather than let the animal suffer to death.

In cases where pets are needlessly killed or harmed by traps, the whole family is traumatized. It can be emotionally devastating for a child to lose a beloved pet due to the severe injuries inflicted by a trap. The provision in Raised Bill 5324 requiring that trappers report non-target catches, such as pets, is essential for getting help for some captured animals or at the very least, providing closure for families who lose beloved pets to trapping incidents.

In 2009, the leghold trap was brought to Connecticut legislators' attention when various media reported a Great-horned owl found badly injured in a leghold trap, and then months later, a similar situation occurred when a rehabilitator was called out to rescue a screech owl in a tree with a trap dangling from his leg. These cases brought more invisible victims into the spotlight.

Because these traps can be so injurious to whatever animal stumbles into them, it is vital to restrict their use so traps are not placed in areas where children might encounter them.

Restricting the placement of leghold traps is not enough however; we also request that the bill be broadened to include body crushing traps. Body-crushing traps (also called Conibear or smooth wire traps) are designed to snap shut on an animal's spinal column at the base of the skull. This trap is commonly used to trap thousands of beavers and muskrats each year in Connecticut -- yet they are also the same trap that is responsible for over half the recent cases of pets caught in traps.

Due to the fact that the clamping force of the body-crushing trap is meant to crush an animal's abdomen, head, or other body parts, it's not surprising that most animals caught in these traps are mortally injured and have major spinal cord injuries. These traps pose a danger to curious children and need to be included in this bill's restrictions.

Why Trap Restrictions are Essential:

- **Leghold traps and body-crushing traps are non-selective:** Each year leghold and body-crushing traps in Connecticut are used to legally kill 6,500 wild animals a year, while the number of "non-target" animals—domestic dogs and cats, rabbits, songbirds, raptors -- goes unreported.

The high rate of "non-target" captures ranges from 0 - 67% according to studies (AVMA, April 2008) which is not surprising, since the trap will spring on anything of sufficient weight that sets foot in it. Non-target animals caught in traps can be theoretically released but usually have little chance of survival due to injury severity. These traps pose an obvious risk to pets and children.

- **These traps cause suffering:** Both of these types of traps will cause significant physical damage to animals ranging from bone fractures, tooth damage and twisted ligaments to hemorrhage. A scientific paper which reviewed mammal trapping studies stated "across the literature, the majority of studies show a significant percentage of trapped individuals suffering major injuries" (Iossa and Soulsbury, 2007). Connecticut trappers are only required to check traps every 24 hours, so the animal can struggle over a prolonged period, and be subject to weather extremes, pain and predation – i.e. literally being eaten alive since they can't get away.
- **Little has changed in 170 years:** Since its creation in the 1820's, leghold traps have gone through marketing "face change," such as being referred to as "foothold traps" to avoid the stigma associated with leghold traps. However, these devices are not akin to Cinderella's slipper, as their new name implies, but are much the same primitive device that they were a nearly century ago.
- **There is precedent for restricting the use of leghold traps.** Eight states , including Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Washington; Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, and New Jersey, have banned or severely restricted the use of leghold and body-crushing traps due to safety and humane concerns.
- **Trapping is often confused with "population control"**. The leghold trap is used almost entirely for recreational reasons, not necessity. Wild animals have high *compensatory reproduction* abilities which easily offset losses caused by trapping. This means that trapped animals' numbers bounce back by the next breeding season due to increased litter size, breeding at an earlier age, increased juvenile survival, etc – all phenomenon that are biologically adapted to help wild animals recover from cyclic population losses. Trapping merely creates this bounce-back effect which is in no way provides any population

“control” unless a large proportion of the population is removed along with the food source and habitat features which attracted them in the first place – both of which present a virtual impossibility except in the rarest of cases.

- **These traps are NOT necessary for nuisance wildlife control:** The vast majority of nuisance wildlife animal removal is done in largely suburban/ urban areas where leghold traps would pose a huge safety hazard. For this reason, box traps are the trap of choice. This bill would not impede licensed nuisance wildlife control trappers (NWCOS).

For all these reasons, The HSUS strongly urges a favorable report on Bill 5324 given the clear risk of potential physical and emotional harm caused to children by archaic trapping devices.

Citations:

- AVMA -Issues in animal welfare. Backgrounder: Welfare implications of leghold trap use in conservation and research, April 30, 2008.
- Kellert, Stephen R.. 1980. Phase III: Knowledge, affection and basic attitudes toward animals in American Society. United States Fish and Wildlife Service Report: 162 pp.
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- Broom D. The welfare of vertebrate pests in relation to their management. In *Advances in Vertebrate Pest Management* ed. P. D Cowan and C J Feare, 309-329. Furth: Filander Verlag. 1999
- Powell RA, Proulx, G Trapping and marking terrestrial mammals for research: integrating ethics, performance criteria, techniques and common sense. *ILAR J* 2003;44:259-276.
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