



Testimony of Tracy Coppola  
On Behalf of Born Free USA  
Before the Select Committee on Children  
In Support of House Bill No. 5324

An Act Concerning Child Safety by Restricting the Placement of Leghold Traps

March 6, 2012

On behalf of Born Free USA, a national leader in wildlife protection and conservation with membership throughout Connecticut, I thank Chair Urban and the Select Committee on Children for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 5324.

Championed by Chair Urban, House Bill 5324 is an important and reasonable bill that would help safeguard children and companion animals from harm by restricting placement of leghold traps on or within 1,500 feet of certain areas where both parties are likely to be present, and by requiring expedient reporting of all incidents of nontarget trapping to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

We commend Chair Urban for prioritizing this issue and urge the committee to pass Bill 5324 today.

Protecting the Public from Dangerous Traps is a Born Free USA Priority.

I am thankful that Chair Urban reached out to Born Free USA to pursue this legislation. Born Free USA continually receives heartbreaking reports about family cats and dogs who are either severely injured or killed by leghold traps. We established the Born Free USA Trapping Victims Fund to assist guardians with veterinary costs involved when companion animals are caught in traps,<sup>1</sup> and we keep an online database of these incidents to help bring attention to this escalating public safety issue.<sup>2</sup> As of today, the database lists 347 non-target trapping incidents across the nation, with a death toll of 144, statistics that reflect only the *reported* cases. We encourage anyone who knows the specifics about other non-target trapping incidents to send us the details so we can add them to the database, and we also work closely with individuals impacted by these tragedies who are eager to advocate for legislative reform.

Last year, Born Free USA released the results of a ground-breaking investigation into the world of recreational and professional trapping. We uncovered for the first time in more than a decade the shocking cruelty and brutality involved in the trapping of wild animals for the fur trade. Our investigation proves that despite industry claims to the contrary, leghold traps

<sup>1</sup> See [http://bornfreeusa.org/a10\\_trapping\\_fund.php](http://bornfreeusa.org/a10_trapping_fund.php).

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.bornfreeusa.org/database/trapping\\_incidents.php](http://www.bornfreeusa.org/database/trapping_incidents.php).

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cause serious injuries and extreme suffering to trapped animals. We also revealed that archaic killing methods such as suffocation, drowning and chest crushing are widely used today — methods that in fact would be considered cruelty to animals if inflicted intentionally upon domestic cats or dogs in 47 states.

For our purposes today, the investigation also demonstrates that despite years of research, there have been no significant advances in reducing "collateral damage." In other words, non-target animals still are captured in traps set for other species.<sup>3</sup> No animal is safe from these diabolical devices — dogs, cats, and even threatened and endangered species have become victims.

### Connecticut Lacks Safeguards for Children and Companion Animals from Leghold Traps.

Connecticut received C+ in Born Free USA's State Trapping Report Card, which gives an academic letter grade to states based on their animal trapping regulations that have the greatest impact on animal welfare, wildlife conservation, and public safety.

The state's permissive stance on leghold traps is a key factor for receiving a poor grade. Leghold traps are freely allowed with little restriction in Connecticut but for the requirement that they are padded when set on land and set 100 feet away from buildings located on certain private lands.

While "padded" leghold traps are allegedly more humane than unpadded traps, several studies comparing the effects of padded versus unpadded leghold traps show that both traps cause the same degree of harm. Trapping proponents argue that traps used today in the U.S. are humane, touting the "padded" leghold trap as a commonly used humane alternative to the steel jaw version. However, the only distinctive difference between the two traps is that the padded leghold trap has a thin strip of hard rubber attached to the trap jaws. Numerous studies have shown that padded traps can cause severe injuries to their victims.<sup>4</sup>

Connecticut also lacks a system that requires trappers to report non-target animals caught in traps, thereby further jeopardizing the safety of citizens who traverse public areas while unaware where non-targets have been victimized.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the investigation documented a domestic cat found dead in a cable snare. It has been strangled by one of the cables [the trapper] has set. [The trapper] says he [usually] catches a few cats in the foothold traps." [http://www.bornfreeusa.org/a10a1\\_investigation.php](http://www.bornfreeusa.org/a10a1_investigation.php).

<sup>4</sup> See Hubert, G. F., L. L. Hungerford, and R. D. Bluett. 1997. Injuries to coyotes captured in modified foothold traps. WILDLIFE SOCIETY BULLETIN. 25:858-863 (1997); Linhart, S. B., F. S. Blom, G. J. Dasch, and R. M. Engeman. *Field evaluation of padded jaw coyote traps: effectiveness and foot injury*. PROCEEDINGS OF THE VERTEBRATE PEST CONFERENCE 13:226-229 (1988). See also Olsen, G. H., R. G. Linscombe, V. L. Wright, and R. A. Holmes. *Reducing injuries to terrestrial furbearers by using padded foothold traps*, WILDLIFE SOCIETY BULLETIN 16:303-307 (1988).

## The Leghold is one of the Most Dangerous Traps Used Today.

The weight of an animal stepping between the jaws of the trap causes the jaws to slam shut on the victim's leg, or other body part, in a vice-like grip. Most animals react to the instant pain by frantically pulling against the trap in a desperate attempt to free themselves, enduring fractures, ripped tendons, edema, blood loss, amputations, and starvation. On land, leghold traps are most frequently set for coyote, bobcat, fox, raccoon, skunk and other furbearing animals.

Studies show that up to 76 percent of nontarget animals are captured by leghold traps, representing one of the highest non-target capture rates of any control method.<sup>5</sup> The leghold has been declared inhumane by the American Animal Hospital Association and the National Animal Control Association. More than 80 countries have banned its use,<sup>6</sup> while eight U.S. states have banned or restricted its use.<sup>7</sup> At least four other state legislatures have already introduced bills this year to limit placement of legholds and other body-gripping traps.<sup>8</sup>

For any animal caught in a leghold trap, death is far from instantaneous. Instead, these animals languish for days and suffer from severe physical injury, hypothermia, and predation. Animals captured in leghold traps endure fractures, ripped tendons, edema, blood loss, amputations, and starvation. Some animals will even chew or twist their limbs off in order to escape.

As wildlife habitat fragmentation continues to push leghold trap placement closer toward areas inhabited by humans, the leghold will continue to compromise public safety.

## Legholds Pose a Grave and Documented Threat to Unsuspecting Children.

The impact of non-target victims is not limited to non-human animals. Within the portfolio of incidents where leghold traps have killed or dismembered family companion animals, Born Free USA has compiled the following as a sample of reported cases involving children who have encountered leghold traps, as well as adults who have feared for the safety of children amid these traps:

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<sup>5</sup> Novak, M. 1981. *The Foot-snare and the Leg-hold Traps: A Comparison*. PROCEEDINGS WORLDWIDE FURBEARER CONFERENCE: 3:1671-1685.

<sup>6</sup> Austria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, British West Indies, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cayman Islands, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Israel, Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Korea, Lebanon, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mali, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritania, Mexico, Moldavia, Morocco, Mozambique, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Scotland, Senegal, Seychelles, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad & Tobago, Tunisia, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Wales, Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

<sup>7</sup> Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Washington.

<sup>8</sup> Idaho S.1239; Minnesota S.F. 1736; Mississippi HB 1932/S2167; and New York A.3743, A.3801 (prohibits the use of body-gripping traps within 100 feet of a public highway, public road, dwelling, school, playground, day care facility, place of worship, athletic field or public bike paths, walking paths or hiking trail).

- **Ansonia, CT: August 5, 2011.** Children in Ansonia found a cat with his leg caught in a leghold trap and reported it to the police. Extensively mutilated after being in the trap for so long, the cat was later euthanized. In response, police asked residents to gather information about other leghold traps that may have been placed in nearby residential areas, and Ansonia Animal Control Officer Jean Roslonowski stated:  
**“A child could get caught in one.”**

Officer Roslonowski has since shared with Born Free USA that she has long been concerned that more children will encounter leghold traps and that, just years prior, children in Ansonia found a kitten caught in a leghold trap that had to have his leg amputated in order to survive.<sup>9</sup>

- **Roseland, VA: January 29, 2012.** A 9 year old boy ran to the cries of his 77-year old neighbor. The paw of her dog, Nutmeg, was caught in a leghold trap set on a public trail where they often walk. The boy helped her hold the dog so that it would not fight the trap and break its leg, as commonly happens. Finally the woman’s husband was able to carefully remove the dog’s paw. Had the boy not heard her cries for help and gotten help right away, the dog could have been severely injured or killed.<sup>10</sup>
- **Hungry Horse, MT: November of 2011.** A grandmother took her grandchildren, ages 5 and 6, and her two dogs for a walk on the trail behind her house. Both dogs were caught in leghold traps set less than 100 feet from the gated road. She later reflected:  
**“I told the kids not to move as it suddenly dawned on me we are in a landmine [sic] of traps. My grandchildren had just run over the area and fortunately missed getting their legs crushed . . . My grand-kids were totally traumatized.”**
- **Missoula, MT. Nov. 27, 2009.** On Thanksgiving Day, a man and his young nephew were walking their dog when it suddenly got caught in a leghold trap. The dog suffered a serious injury and, shockingly, the trap was already re-set when the man returned to investigate further; he later reflected:  
**“[w]ho on earth would put a trap in a spot that’s frequented not just by dogs and horses, but by people too? It wouldn’t have been a stretch for one of our kids to have stepped in it.”<sup>11</sup>**

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<sup>9</sup> VALLEY GAZETTE, *Search is on for Leg Traps After Cat is Hurt* (Aug. 9, 2011); Ansonia Police Department Case/Incident Report, provided by Officer Jean Rosnowlowski to Tracy Coppola, Born Free USA (available from Born Free USA upon request); phone conversations between Rosnowlowski and Coppola on November 23, 2011 and February 29, 2012. Ansonia police reports from 2001 document a raccoon found with both his front leg and back leg caught in a two separate leghold traps. The raccoon was released from the trap by Ansonia police officers, with uncertain survival due to the severity of injuries.

<sup>10</sup> NELSON COUNTY TIMES, *Roseland Boy Helps Save Trapped Dog* (Feb. 15, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Weber, NEW-WEST.NET, *My Dog in a Trap on Thanksgiving Day* (Nov. 27, 2009).

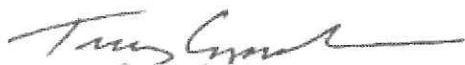
- **Stony Plain, Alberta: October of 2007.** A woman walking her dog in Hasse Lake Provincial Park spotted a leghold trap. **Fearing it could be dangerous for children**, she tried to disable it by fiddling with some levers on the back, but it clamped shut on her hand and injured her.<sup>12</sup>
- **Minneapolis, MN. September 14, 1985.** A 14-year old boy had to **endure having four of his toes amputated** due to extensive nerve and tissue damage and a two-month hospital stay after his foot was caught in a leghold trap.<sup>13</sup>

Until leghold traps are restricted from certain areas designated by Bill 5324, these tragic cases will increase, and children will continue to be placed in harm's way. It is time for Connecticut to pass commonsense legislation that addresses usage of leghold traps, especially in areas commonly frequented by children and companion animals.

By restricting placement of leghold traps set on or within 1,500 feet of an elementary or secondary school, licensed child day care center, park, playground, public road, highway, public boat launch, roadside rest area, picnic area, campground, blazed trail or state hiking trail, and by requiring trappers to report non-target catches within 24 hours, passage of House Bill 5324 will be a strong step toward protecting children, companion animals, and entire communities from a dangerous and inhumane activity.

Please pass House Bill 5324 today before any more children or companion animals are hurt.

Sincerely,



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Born Free USA

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<sup>12</sup> CALGARY SUN, (Oct. 2007); See Born Free USA Nontarget Trapping Incident Report: [http://www.bornfreeusa.org/database/trapping\\_incident.php?id=67n](http://www.bornfreeusa.org/database/trapping_incident.php?id=67n)

<sup>13</sup> ST. PAUL DISPATCH & PIONEER (Sept. 18. 1985)