February 22, 2017

Dear Co-Chair Kennedy, Co-Chair Miner, Co-Chair Demicco, Vice Chair Flexer, Vice Chair Gresko, Vice Chair Somers, Ranking Member Harding, and Honorable Members of the Environment Committee,

Please accept this public hearing testimony in OPPOSITION to SB 832.

I care about animals, including wildlife, and I vote. I strongly support and promote humane resolutions to conflicts with wildlife and preventative measures to minimize risk of such conflicts.

I oppose SB 832 as currently written for the following 4 reasons:
1) SB 832 does not address the major sources of habituation (e.g., accessible garbage, pet food left outside, certain types of bird feeders)! As currently written, SB 832 does not serve to address the issue of conflicts with potentially dangerous wildlife;

2) SB 832 would unfairly penalize those who care for community cats. Sec. 1 (e), which defines "potentially dangerous animal" for purposes of this section, includes "felidae," a broad family of felids that includes domestic cats. Community cat caregivers provide a public service at oftentimes great personal expense, reducing cat overpopulation through TNR (trap, neuter, return) programs, a science-based approach that has been proven effective. Absence of this public service would generate a near-immediate outcome of overcrowded conditions and stretched resources at animal control agencies and shelters. Rather than penalizing these generous caregivers, and stretching the already strapped animal care infrastructure, emphasis should instead be placed on proactive solutions, like laws and ordinances that focus on incentivizing spay/neuter and humane management programs for community cats;

3) SB 832 would be unpopular and unenforceable. Sec. 1 (e) contains the biological family names "felidae" and "canidae," which include domestic cats and domestic dogs. Inclusion of these categories would be hugely unpopular with Connecticut voters, and as a practical matter, unenforceable; and

4) Unlike last year's bill (2016's HB 5315), SB 832 makes no provision for education, and public education is precisely what is indicated here.

Substitute language should be considered that would address the matter of habituation and conflict prevention through public education on how to coexist with coyotes and bears. DEEP should partner with The Humane Society of the United States (a trusted leader in the fight to protect wildlife through community engagement) to develop educational materials that are effective, humane, science-based, and sustainable, and provide that such educational materials include the topics of removal of attractants and hazing techniques.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours truly,
Joseph Mason
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Sent from my iPad