

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20515

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,



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Mike Quigley  
Member of Congress



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Brian Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress



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Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress



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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

/s/  
Rashida Tlaib  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Vicente Gonzalez  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Alan Lowenthal  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Ayanna Pressley  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Ann McLane Kuster  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Sheila Jackson Lee  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Matt Gaetz  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Colin Z. Allred  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Joe Neguse  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Derek Kilmer  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Fred Upton  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Tulsi Gabbard  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Deb Haaland  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Susan A. Davis  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Dina Titus  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Jason Crow  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Bill Foster  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Guy Reschenthaler  
Member of Congress

/s/  
André Carson  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Jerry McNerney  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Anna G. Eshoo  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Donald S. Beyer, Jr.  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Thomas R. Suozzi  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Brendan F. Boyle  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Lisa Blunt Rochester  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Christopher H. Smith  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Debbie Wasserman Schultz  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Cindy Axne  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Scott H. Peters  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Eliot L. Engel  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress

/s/

Josh Harder  
Member of Congress

/s/

Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress

/s/

Alcee L. Hastings  
Member of Congress