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April 5, 2021

Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Wildfire Recovery
Oregon Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, TX 97301

Re: **SUPPORT for SB 832** (Prozanski) – Mink farming ban.

Dear Chair Golden, Vice Chair Heard, and Members of the Committee:

The Animal Legal Defense Fund, a national animal protection nonprofit with thousands of supporters in Oregon, writes to express support for Senate Bill 832. We thank Senator Prozanski for his leadership on animal protection issues and for introducing this important legislation. We respectfully urge the Committee to support SB 832 to eliminate this COVID-19 vector and protect the health of Oregonians.

The Animal Legal Defense Fund is the nation's preeminent legal advocacy organization for animals. The organization's mission is to protect the lives and advance the interests of animals through the legal system. We are working nationwide to combat the cruel fur industry across multiple legal channels. SB 832 would bring mink farming in Oregon to an end, halt breeding programs to help stop the spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19, and assist current Oregon producers in the transition away from mink farming.

Every year, millions of animals, including foxes, mink, and rabbits, are brutally killed so people can wear their fur. Most of the animals exploited by the fur industry are raised on fur farms, often in factory-farm-like conditions, and some are trapped in the wild. If passed, Oregon could be a leader by taking a strong stance against the cruel and unnecessary fur industry, especially as it relates to now known public health risks as exemplified by COVID-19.

Mink production spreads COVID-19 and is a breeding ground for the next pandemic.

Intensive confinement systems on fur farms present conditions ripe for disease transmission. Recent reports from mink fur farms abroad have revealed dangerous links between the fur industry and the further spread of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) to humans. In 2020, mink on over 400 fur factory farms in Canada, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the United States tested positive for SARS-CoV-2. In Denmark and the Netherlands, research shows that farmed mink spread a mutated form of the virus to humans—the only known animal-to-human transmission outside the original source—and such mutations might reduce the efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines.

To protect public health, European governments have killed nearly 20 million mink and France, Hungary, and the Netherlands passed laws to ban fur farming. In the United States, COVID-19 has been found on fur farms in at least four states – Oregon, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Utah – and as many as 15,000 mink in Utah and Wisconsin have died from COVID-19. In December, a wild mink in Utah, and at least two mink here in Oregon, tested positive for the virus during screenings of wildlife surrounding infected fur farms, highlighting the risk of viral spill-over to wildlife populations. The mink caught in Oregon are believed to have escaped

All our clients are innocent

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from a nearby fur farm which was under quarantine at the time due to an outbreak that impacted both mink and humans.

Research has shown that other animals commonly farmed for their fur, such as raccoon dogs, palm civets, and foxes, may also serve as intermediate hosts of other coronaviruses, including SARS-CoV (the virus that causes SARS).

Fur requires significant animal cruelty.

Whether trapped in the wild or bred to die on fur farms, animals exploited by the fur industry endure tremendous suffering.

Animals on fur farms are typically confined to tiny wire cages for their entire lives. Oftentimes, these cages are outdoors— stacked in wooden sheds that provide no protection from the heat or cold. On other farms, animals are kept in cages in barns that are poorly ventilated and high concentrations of ammonia — a byproduct of animals' waste — burns the eyes and throats of animals and workers alike. Unable to engage in most of their natural behaviors, these animals routinely resort to self-mutilation, obsessive pacing, and infanticide. Fur farms kill animals through gassing, electrocution, neck-breaking, and poisoning. Undercover investigations on fur farms have documented egregious cruelty — including animals being skinned alive.

Fur puts our environment at risk.

The fur industry also poses serious environmental threats. On fur factory farms, waste runoff from animals pollutes the soil and waterways. The tanning and dyeing process uses toxic and carcinogenic chemicals, like chromium and formaldehyde, to prevent the skin from decaying.

Studies have found that among synthetic and natural textiles, fur is the worst-offending in 17 of the 18 environmental categories considered. The studies also found that the climate change impact of mink fur is five times higher than the second worst-offending textile (wool) and six times higher than a faux-fur alternative. This is largely due to the feed, land use, toxicity, and manure of the fur industry. Fortunately, innovative technology has produced an array of alternatives with the same warmth, look and feel as fur – without the cruelty or environmental concerns.

Fur alternatives exist.

There is no justification to continue to breed or trap and kill animals for their fur considering the availability of faux fur and alternative products that are virtually indistinguishable from animal fur. So indistinguishable that, in 2017, we called for a Baltimore furrier to be investigated for false advertising when they used an image of a faux fur jacket from the HBO series Game of Thrones to advertise the animal furs in their store.

Fur-free policies are on the rise.

Consumers' concern for the animal cruelty, infectious disease, and environmental threats from fur is leading fashion brands and legislators away from animal fur.

Hundreds of retailers, brands, and designers at all price points have announced fur-free policies, including: Macy's, Nordstrom, Bloomingdale's, Adidas, Michael Kors, Armani, Calvin Klein, Kenneth Cole, Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, The North Face, and JCPenney.

In 2019, California became the first state in the nation to ban the sale of fur. This year, states like Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island are considering similar bans. Abroad, at least eighteen European countries, including Denmark, The Netherlands, France, Germany, Austria, Croatia, and the United Kingdom are in the process of phasing out or have already banned fur farming. India has banned the importation of fur pelts, and São Paulo, Brazil also banned the sale of fur products in 2015.

As consumer demand for fur products rapidly shrinks, the price of fur at markets has plummeted in recent years. This consumer distaste for fur resulted in the bankruptcy of the largest fur auction house in North America – North American Fur Auctions – and the largest fur auction house in the world – Copenhagen Fur – also announced its closure in 2020. Oregon should take action now to help producers transition away from the cruel fur industry and ensure the stability and health of the Oregon economy.

Oregon, time to end mink farming.

The continued production of fur on mink farms in Oregon is inconsistent with its position as a leader on animal protection and environmental issues. By passing SB 832, Oregon will lead the fur-free charge, reinforce the shift to fur-free products that is occurring in the fashion industry, and ensure that Oregon producers are at the forefront of a more ethical economy. Oregon should seize this opportunity to align the state's laws more closely with its values.

It is for these reasons that the Animal Legal Defense Fund supports the passage of SB 832. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Hauge". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter "J" being particularly large and stylized.

Jennifer Hauge
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