

Dear Chairman Golden, Vice Chair Heard, and Members of The Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery,

Thank you for considering my written testimony in support of SB0832, to phase out and ultimately prohibit mink farming in Oregon. In SB0832, important health and safety concerns related to controlling the spread of COVID 19 converge with very important animal welfare objectives that are shared by most Oregonians – all with minimal fiscal impacts on the State and its residents.

I'm going to first address the animal welfare. I suspect most of you have never visited a mink farm, and have never seen or studied mink in the wild. I have done both, and I'll share my observations about both experiences in a moment.

But before going there, I think it is important that we pause on a question that might otherwise get lost in this discussion: why are mink raised in a factory farm situation at all? **Pelts. Their fur.** That's it. Mostly for decorative or vanity purposes. We don't eat mink. They don't lay eggs. They aren't companion animals. However, the use of farmed mink fur is no longer needed due to emerging technologies/products that make mink farming unnecessary. Most Oregonians no longer condone use of fur for decorative or vanity purposes, and we have so many non-animal products now available that can do as well or better anything that mink fur can do. So, since the market here has for all intents and purposes dried up, where does the fur from these farmed mink end up? Mostly in China.

As I mentioned, I have personal experience with mink farming during my younger days in Kansas. My dad worked on one, so I spent a lot of time there with him. Moreover, for many years – as part of my dad's efforts to support our family – I also trapped mink, so I came to know and admire these animals in their natural state. Learning their habits and behaviors in the wild was an awesome experience. But it also caused me to pity those mink which were born, lived and died in the unnatural, cruel environment of a mink farm. And although I don't condone now taking these incredible creatures for fur either from the wild or farms, the confluence of my experiences informs why I'm asking you to support SB0832.

Mink *in the wild* are among the most clever, wily, curious, athletic – and most fastidious – animals. Wild mink solve problems, are playful and love to swim

and dive, eat only what they kill and don't waste anything, are keen observers of their environment (I have seen them shy away from a trail if a single stick on it has been disturbed), and even establish and re-use a waste disposal area well away from their dens.

By contrast, mink in a "farmed" environment are mentally tortured, confined to small cages with no water to wash (much less play) in, and are driven to aggressive behavior – all before being killed (often in an inhumane way) and having their pelts shipped to China.

I want to now turn briefly to the health and safety objective SB0832 will achieve. As you know, our state has turned its economy upside down in order to mitigate the COVID 19 risk to Oregonians. Those efforts, which have been life-altering for many of us, have been substantially successful. There are, however, a few places where that cannot be said. Mink farms are one of those places.

This is not an imagined or hypothetical risk. Denmark (which has a much, much larger financial stake in mink farming than Oregon) and Utah, Wisconsin and Michigan all saw COVID outbreaks in the mink farms that led to mass deaths and culls of thousands of animals because of the risk that a mink variant could jump to humans or other domesticated or wild animals.

On this issue, we have an opportunity to lead, not follow. As an Oregonian, I value the fact that Oregon often does lead by showing other states and countries "the way" on human health and animal welfare issues. I urge you to do that again by advancing SB0832.

I know that fiscal impact in these challenging times is also important to consider. Fortunately, the impact of SB0832 is not large, given the relatively finite number of operations it will affect. But when the minimal fiscal impact of SB0832 is balanced against the good to all Oregonians it provides, in terms of health and safety, as well as implementing the humane values most Oregonians hold dear, it is worth the sacrifice.

Thank you again for taking the time to read my testimony.

Sincerely,

René P. Tatro, Lake Oswego, Oregon

