

Prohibiting the sale, offer for sale or trade of fur product in State of Oregon

Testimony regarding Bill HB 3390, to ban the sale of new fur products

My name is Emma Hakansson, I'm the founding director of Collective Fashion Justice, a not-for-profit working for a total ethics fashion system prioritising the life and wellbeing of people, our fellow animals and the planet before profit. Today I write on behalf of the organisation and our supporters.

I'd like to extend our sincere thanks to the Oregon State House Committee on Judiciary, for engaging with a bill as important and progressive as this one. Fashion is often shunned as vapid and unimportant, but fashion is both a powerful form of expression and utterly serious in its impact on the planet and those we share it with. I would like to spend some time highlighting the intersecting harms the fur industry contributes to, and which the House will continue to co-sign until this proposed bill is passed.

As much as 95% of all fur comes from animals who spend their short, miserable lives confined to factory-farms. Foxes are commonly kept in wire cages just a square metre small, despite naturally roaming a territory 10,000 times greater. While mink naturally live nearby the water they so love to dive in, those encaged by the fur industry will never fulfil their most basic and natural instinct of swimming.

The lives of these animals, as well as raccoon dogs, chinchillas and other confined fur-bearing species, are those of total deprivation. The unnatural conditions they suffer through mentally break them, shown through common signs of serious psychological distress like hours upon hours of repetitive head nodding and pacing, severe self mutilation and even cannibalism.

The slaughter of these animals is no better. In SLAY, a documentary film our organisation contributed to, a fur industry CEO refers to what their sector considers 'humane slaughter': for foxes, and I apologise for the confronting nature of this, but really, this is what we're here to discuss the legal acceptability of, this means forcing an electrode into the mouth and anus of the animals, before flicking an 'on-off' switch. For minks, it's death by gassing, taking a whole 15 minutes.

Some American companies have referred to their use of 'farm-free' fur, the implication being that such products may be more ethical. But footage from across the United States shows us trapped animals so frightened they uncontrollably urinate just before their killing. Native animals like coyotes, raccoons and muskrats have been known to break their teeth gnawing their own feet off in frantic efforts to free themselves from metal traps.

Every single product containing fur is a kind of ghost of this unimaginable suffering. They are what these complex, clever, thinking and feeling individuals are reduced to. A fur trim, a bobble on a beanie, a coat, a key ring.

In my opinion, and in the opinion of the organisation I represent, this should be enough to justify unanimously passing this bill. But the fur industry is not done.

The production of fur is also an environmental disaster. Fur trapping is totally indiscriminate, capturing and killing all kinds of native species, including those governments across the US work to protect. Meanwhile, fur factory-farms are major ammonia and phosphorus emissions contributors, and these emissions can lead to eutrophication which can strangle aquatic ecosystems, even creating dead zones.

Once fur has been 'dressed' – the industry term equivalent to 'tanning' for leather, it is no longer biodegradable, even according to industry studies. In France, advertisements referring to fur as 'natural' and 'eco-friendly' have been banned, recognised to be 'strongly misleading'. The carbon equivalent impact of a mink fur coat is nearly 250 kilograms more harmful than even the least sustainable synthetic faux fur, and today we have wholly recycled, even biodegradable and bio-based fur alternatives to take their place.

Finally, fur-dressing is so toxic and filled with carcinogenic substances that people who work processing furs face higher risks of acute and chronic conditions: skin complaints, eye irritation, cancer, and in the most egregious cases of poor workplace safety, death. Across numerous countries, fur products, including those sold for children, have been substantially contaminated with hazardous chemicals at levels which breached legal industry standards.

Today, nearly 70% of the most profitable luxury fashion brands have banned fur, and a number of global fashion week events have too. The vast majority of large retailers and high street fashion brands have also banned fur. Numerous countries have banned fur farming, a growing number of councils have banned fur sales. Just some months ago I spoke at the European Parliament, where a ban on all fur farming and related product sales is being considered. The proposed bill is in line with a global move towards more responsible, just and sustainable fashion production – and we cannot accept anything less than that.

Thank you very much for your time, for your openness and consideration.

(All information and references available via collectivefashionjustice.org)

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