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**RE: Memorandum of Opposition to SB 769**

Dear Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash, and Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire,

On behalf of the Animal Legal Defense Fund, the nation's preeminent legal advocacy organization for animals, and its members in Oregon, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to submit this memorandum in opposition to SB 769, providing that a county is exempt from the applicability of a statute banning the use of dogs to hunt or pursue cougars if voters approve a county measure proposed by initiative petition or referred to the people by the governing body of the county. This legislation seeks to undermine the clear will of Oregon voters – with no wildlife management benefit to justify it – and create a confusing patchwork approach to wildlife management, unheard of anywhere else in the country. I respectfully urge the committee to **vote NO** on this misguided bill.

**This measure is anti-democratic** and, if enacted, would completely undermine the will of Oregon voters and Oregon's ballot measure system. In 1994, Oregon voters first passed Measure 18, which made the hunting of cougars with packs of radio-collared dogs ("hounding") illegal. And, in 1996, an even larger majority of Oregon voters rejected a measure repealing Measure 18. This sentiment remains to this day as 65 percent of Oregon residents are opposed to trophy hunting Oregon's cougars, according to a 2019 survey by Remington Research Group. Allowing legislation such as SB 769 to pass would create a messy and unmanageable legal precedent allowing counties to disregard Oregon's voter-approved measures and Oregon's democratic process. It could discourage voters from participating in the ballot measure process altogether if what they vote for can be undermined at the discretion of Congress.

**This measure is harmful to cougars, humans, pets, and livestock.** For over 30 years, Measure 18 has protected cougars, humans, pets, and livestock alike. Not only is the hounding of cougars exceedingly cruel, it is also dangerous. Hounds frequently maul and/or kill cougar kittens and non-target wildlife while chasing adult cougars. They may also chase them onto private lands, bringing them closer to humans, and pets, than they would have ever gotten on their own. Further, hounds may be injured or killed in the hunting process if the cougar tries to fight for her survival. The practice is also highly disturbing to both deer populations as well as nearby livestock, impacting their abilities to reproduce.

**This measure would not reduce cougar-livestock conflicts.** The research is clear – killing too many adult cougars increases conflicts with livestock. Resident adult cougars keep cougar populations in order. When too many of them are killed, conflicts with livestock increase as young cats dispersing to find their own territories look for easy food sources. Dispersing cats are often killed by resident adult cougars (keeping the cougar population down), but if too many adult cougars are killed, this order cannot be maintained. Further, orphaned young cats that have not learned to hunt optimal prey from their mothers are more likely to predate on livestock.

**All our clients are innocent**

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Without this cruel and unsportsmanlike practice, conflicts between cougars and livestock are extremely rare. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, cougars account for approximately 0.05% of cattle mortalities and 0.16% of sheep mortalities in Oregon. This nominal risk of conflict can be mitigated by humane, non-lethal measures. Further, Measure 18 specifically exempts the use of hounds in response to individual cougars who threaten property or public safety, or to carry out state wildlife management objectives.

Finally, a system that allows counties to “opt out” of state law will become too unruly and confusing to enforce. Wildlife management across the state should be consistent and based on the best available science.

SB 769 is a dangerous departure from Measure 18’s voter-approved protections and should not be allowed to pass. An overwhelming majority of Oregon voters view the hounding and trophy hunting of cougars as cruel and unethical, and voted to prohibit the practice through Oregon’s democratic ballot measure process. Undermining this sets a dangerous precedent and will instill distrust among Oregon’s voters towards a government that puts the interests of a few over the will of the people – particularly when doing so serves no justifiable wildlife management purpose.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to vote NO on SB 769. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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