



**Testimony of
Jo-Anne Basile, Executive Director, CT Votes for Animals
Before
The Joint Committee on the Environment
March 14, 2022
In Support of 5293 with modifications and In Opposition to SB 244**

Co-Chairs Senator Cohen and Representative Gresko, Vice Chairs Senator Slap and Representative Palm, Ranking Senator Miner and Representative Harding, Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on the Environment.

I am Jo-Anne Basile, Executive Director of CT Votes for Animals, a grassroots organization advocating for animals on behalf of our almost 6,000 supporters across the State. CVA is also a member of the CT Coalition to Protect Bears, representing environmental and animal advocates promoting non-lethal solutions to peacefully coexist with bears and other wildlife.

For the record, CVA strongly supports HB5293, with modifications, AA Prohibiting the Use of Wild and Exotic Animals in Traveling Animal Acts. CVA Board member Karen Laski will be testifying on that bill and will articulate our concerns about the need to close a loophole in the raised bill.

I am here today to voice CVA's strong opposition to SB 244 AN ACT CONCERNING WILDLIFE THAT CAUSES DAMAGE TO LIVESTOCK, POULTRY OR BEES.

Let me begin by making clear that CVA has no quarrel with the right and need for farmers to protect their crops and livestock. This is a farmer's livelihood and state law should offer those protections. CVA, however, asserts that authority already exists in two places: CGS 26-3 DEEP's authority to "destroy" wildlife it determines ". . . aggressively invades, or is likely to be detrimental to, agricultural crops, native plants, livestock or wildlife, . . ." and CGS § 26-47, the current nuisance wildlife statute.

SB 244 is a dangerous expansion of existing authority and if passed, this bill will sanction a level of hostile fire against our state's wildlife, the likes of which have never been seen in Connecticut. The bill is at odds with scientifically sound wildlife management principals. Specifically, SB 244:

- 1) Expands the covered situations to hobby beekeepers and people with chickens in their backyard offering protection well beyond an individual who makes their living from agricultural farming.

- 2) Fails to define and establish a standard for “unreasonable damage” by wildlife that triggers a hunt.
- 3) Grants the authority to hunt virtually to anyone by delegating wildlife killing, expands the time to 24 hours a day, 365 days/year. Offers no parameters for when and how the killing shall be done; demands no proof that the target wildlife is in fact the wildlife doing the damage; sets no limits on the number of species killed.
- 4) Makes no requirements for individuals to take reasonable steps to protect crops and livestock and to demonstrate non-lethal methods were tried.
- 5) Provides no checks and balances or oversight.
- 6) Institutionalizes the killing of protected species – bobcat and bear – without any public input.

One additional point to consider. By allowing a hunter to keep its kill SB244 opens the door to what is now considered poaching. It creates an incentive to kill highly prized animals such as bears and bobcats. As many of you know, there is a high-priced market for bear gall bladders and paws.

To the uninitiated, this bill appears simple and limited. Nothing could be further from the truth. Let’s call it what it is. This is a hunting bill wrapped up in farmer’s overalls.

While an unfortunate reality of nature, examples of bear killing livestock remains rare in Connecticut. But you cannot and should not legislate expansive policy over rare events. When you kill wildlife because they damaged crops but never solve the underlying issue, i.e., insufficient use of adequate protective methods– it only perpetuates the cycle of problems and the cycle of killing. A strong program of education where DEEP can help farmers learn and use the latest methods of keeping their crops and livestock safe from predators, coupled with DEEP’s existing authority to destroy wildlife damaging agriculture crops and livestock is what is needed and what will work.

I urge the Committee not to make an error and establish an open season on all of CT’s wildlife, 24 hours/day, all year long. The tools are there, they just must be used.

Thank you,

Jo-Anne Basile

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