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March 8, 2024

Testimony of Susan Linker, Board Member, CT Votes for Animals
To the Environment Committee

In Opposition to SB 196 AAC the Harvesting of Rabbits for the Local Food Supply
In Support – if amended -- of SB 291 AAC the Sale of Certain Balloons
In Support – if amended -- of SB 190 AAC the Use of Neonicotinoids

Senator Lopes, Representative Gresko, vice chairs, ranking members, and honorable members of the Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony regarding three bills on behalf of CT Votes for Animals.

We strongly **oppose SB 196 AAC the Harvesting of Rabbits for the Local Food Supply**. Rabbits are loving, smart, sociable animals with unique personalities, which is why they have become one of our countries most popular and beloved pets.

The USDA does not include rabbits in its definition of livestock; therefore, they are not protected by their laws and regulations. This bill would result in thousands of these innocent creatures being subjected to some of the worst forms of cruelty of all farmed animals.

The reality of modern rabbit farming is barbaric and deplorable. There is no data to support an increased desire for rabbit meat in the U.S. and certainly not in CT, as evidenced in the past. Like dog meat in Asia, consumers are demanding that pets should not be killed for food.

Treating these family members with kindness and compassion is something that our society has thankfully been moving toward over the years. Most cosmetic companies no longer test on rabbits, many furriers no longer produce coats made from the pelts of rabbits, and laws have been passed that prohibit the sale of commercially bred rabbits in pet stores. Pet industry leaders like PetSmart and Petco no longer sell rabbits. A few years ago, when Whole Foods tried selling rabbit meat, vigorous public outcry resulted in the discontinuation of the sale of rabbit meat by Whole Foods and other stores.

A bill like this is a step backward in the humane treatment of these delightful companion animals. I strongly urge this committee to not support this bill.

Regarding **SB 291 AAC the Sale of Certain Balloons**, we **support** this bill to prohibit the sale of helium and lighter-than-air balloons that are not biodegradable. However, we ask you to **amend** the bill to also ban the release of these balloons. Birds, turtles, and other wildlife commonly mistake balloons for food. Once consumed, animals can choke or experience grave internal injuries, eventually leading to painful death. Many animals become entangled in balloon strings causing strangulation or rendering them unable to fly, move, or escape from

predators. Although balloons take only moments to release, they can take hundreds of years to biodegrade and remain a threat to wildlife for generations into the future. Please protect Connecticut's wildlife and amend this bill to ban the release of these balloons and take favorable action on SB 291 AAC the Sale of Certain Balloons.

Finally, regarding **SB 190 AAC the Use of Neonicotinoids**, we are grateful to the committee for hearing the public's concerns about the dangers of neonicotinoids (neonics) to Connecticut's birds, bees, wildlife, and people. However, **the bill as drafted is deficient and must be amended** to ban the non-agricultural use of neonics. An EPA study from May 2023 shows that the three most commonly-used neonics likely jeopardize the continued existence of over 200 threatened and endangered species – or about 11% of the entire endangered species list¹. New York just banned non-agricultural uses of neonics and most neonic-treated seed. Ten states have some restrictions already in place, and most neonic uses are banned in Europe and parts of Canada. It's time for Connecticut to do the same. Please substitute the language from last year's SB 963 which was approved by both the Environment Committee and the Appropriations Committee.

Thank you for your time and consideration to our concerns on these important issues.

¹ EPA, 2023; <https://www.epa.gov/pesticides/epa-takes-next-step-endangered-species-act-review-three-neonicotinoids>



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Testimony to the Environment Committee

In Support – if amended -- of SB 190 AAC the Use of Neonicotinoids

In Opposition to SB 196 AAC the Harvesting of Rabbits for the Local Food Supply

In Support – if amended -- of SB 291 AAC the Sale of Certain Balloons

Colette Griffin, Board Chair

Good morning, Senator Lopes, Representative Gresko, vice chairs, ranking members, and honorable members of the Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony today regarding three bills on behalf of CT Votes for Animals. We are a grass-roots advocacy organization dedicated to improving the lives of Connecticut's animals, with 8,000 supporters across the state. This written testimony addresses three bills on your agenda today that impact Connecticut's animals.

First, regarding **SB 190 AAC the Use of Neonicotinoids**, we are grateful to the committee for hearing the public's concerns about the dangers of neonicotinoids (neonics) to Connecticut's birds, bees, wildlife, and people. However, **the bill as drafted is deficient and must be amended** to ban the non-agricultural use of neonics. An EPA study from May 2023 shows that the three most commonly-used neonics likely jeopardize the continued existence of over 200 threatened and endangered species – or about 11% of the entire endangered species list¹. New York just banned non-agricultural uses of neonics and most neonic-treated seed. Ten states have some restrictions already in place, and most neonic uses are banned in Europe and parts of Canada. It's time for Connecticut to do the same. Please substitute the language from last year's SB 963 which was approved by both the Environment Committee and the Appropriations Committee and effectively eliminates non-agricultural use of neonicotinoids.

Second, we strongly **oppose SB 196 AAC the Harvesting of Rabbits for the Local Food Supply**. Rabbits are intelligent, gentle, and curious animals and are the third most common family pet after dogs and cats. Rabbits are beloved companion animals in Connecticut and most state residents would be aghast to think that their elected officials would facilitate the slaughter of these lovely animals.

The USDA does not include rabbits in its definition of livestock; therefore, they are not protected by their laws and regulations. The dual categorization of rabbits as both companion animals and animals raised for food leaves rabbits raised for meat unprotected and the industry unregulated. With little oversight, rabbits raised for slaughter are unlikely to receive any humane treatment.

¹ EPA, 2023; <https://www.epa.gov/pesticides/epa-takes-next-step-endangered-species-act-review-three-neonicotinoids>

Because of people's love for these animals, the multi-billion-dollar cosmetic industry has moved away from using rabbits in testing programs in response to consumer demand. Likewise, Whole Foods market attempted to sell rabbit meat and immediately dropped it within a year due to complaints from customers. Like dog meat in Asia, consumers are demanding that pets should not be killed for food.

On behalf of CT Votes for Animals, and animal lovers across the state, we urge to support these beautiful and beloved bunnies and take no further action on SB 196.

Finally, regarding **SB 291 AAC the Sale of Certain Balloons**, we **support** this bill to prohibit the sale of helium and lighter-than-air balloons that are not biodegradable. However, we ask you to **amend** the bill to also ban the release of these balloons. Birds, turtles, and other wildlife commonly mistake balloons for food. Once consumed, animals can choke or experience grave internal injuries, eventually leading to painful death. Many animals become entangled in balloon strings causing strangulation or rendering them unable to fly, move, or escape from predators. Although balloons take only moments to release, they can take hundreds of years to biodegrade and remain a threat to wildlife for generations into the future. Please protect Connecticut's wildlife and amend this bill to ban the release of these balloons and take favorable action on SB 291 AAC the Sale of Certain Balloons.

In summary, we (1) **support, if amended, SB 190 AAC the Use of Neonicotinoids** and ask you to substitute language from last year's SB 193, (2) **strongly oppose SB 196 AAC the Harvesting of Rabbits for the Local Food Supply** and ask you to take no further action on this bill, and (3) **support, if amended, SB 291 AAC the Sale of Certain Balloons** and ask you to take favorable action on this bill and.

Thank you for considering our positions, we would be happy to address any questions that you have.

March 7, 2024

Re: SB 291 – An Act Concerning the Sale of Certain Balloons

Dear Honorable Members of the Environment Committee,

My name is Andrea Dobras and I am a Connecticut resident and Connecticut for Animals Education Fund Board Member . I strongly urge you to **support SB-291** – An Act Concerning the Sale of Certain Balloons.

As someone who lives on the CT shoreline, I am constantly collecting and properly disposing of balloons that have washed up after having been released either intentionally or unintentionally. We owe it to the wildlife in our state to keep them safe from ingesting balloons or being caught up or strangled in the strings. Balloons can take hundreds of years to biodegrade, almost ensuring that they will cause fatal harm to our birds, turtles, and other wildlife during that time.

Thank you for your consideration and **support of SB-291**.

Sincerely,

Andrea Dobras
Secretary/Board Member, Connecticut For Animals Education Fund
116 Morgan Avenue, East Haven, CT 06512

Name: Andrea Kerin

Title: Wildlife & Environ. Advocate

Organization or Agency:

Topic: SB00291 - AAC THE SALE OF CERTAIN BALLOONS.

Supports

Testimony:

I enthusiastically support SB 291 AN ACT CONCERNING THE SALE OF CERTAIN BALLOONS. To prohibit the sale of helium and lighter-than-air gas balloons that are not biodegradable.

Birds, turtles, and other wildlife commonly mistake balloons for food. Once consumed, animals can choke or suffer grave internal injuries, eventually killing them. Many animals become entangled in balloon strings causing strangulation or rendering them unable to fly and become food for predators.

As a volunteer monitor with the Audubon Alliance for Coastal Waterbirds (an alliance that includes DEEP) I've seen and gathered for proper disposal countless balloons and balloon strings polluting our shoreline. I find it washing up at the waterline and clumped up in the sand and beach plants. I've occasionally seen it tangled around dead animals. It is heartbreaking to volunteer protecting vulnerable beach-nesting shorebirds from disruptions that stop successful breeding when I am surrounded by this deadly trash.

Although balloons only take moments to release, they can take hundreds of years to biodegrade and cause serious harm to wildlife.

Please support this bill and stop the senseless pollution and death they cause.

Sincerely,

Andrea Kerin

Environment Public Hearing 3-8-24

Testimony of Karen Laski – Board Member- CT Votes for Animals

SB 291 – An Act Concerning the Sale of Certain Balloons- Support

SB 190 – An Act Concerning the Use of Neonics - Support

SB 196 – An Act Concerning the Harvest of Rabbits for the Local Food Supply – Oppose

Good Afternoon Honorable Members of the Environment Committee,

My name is Karen Laski. I'm a long-time advocate for animals and serve on the Board of CT Votes for Animals. I'm here to speak about three bills.

SB – 291 – An Act Concerning the Sale of Certain Balloons

When balloons that are lighter than air are released toward the sky, many people still aren't aware or maybe not care about the suffering and sadness it brings. The strings or ribbons from balloons can wrap around power lines and cause outages. Birds can be hanged to death from wires or trees while others struggle on the ground to untangle.

Animals such as dolphins, whales, turtles, cows, sheep and dogs can eat the balloon which blocks the animal's respiratory or GI tract causing them to suffocate or starve to death slowly and painfully. 100,000 marine animals die each year according to the "Entanglement Network" I know of a donkey at a sanctuary in Tennessee who died while eating a balloon.

We hope that this bill will be amended to ban the release of these balloons as well as the sale.

The helium in balloons is recoverable in only a few places in the world and is being depleted. Producing more helium that is used for medical MRI's and by NASA for rockets is very expensive and difficult to store.

The release of these balloons is devastating and there are pleasant ways to honor someone. We can plant butterfly gardens, put up birdhouses or release flowers in a pond or river. Many people together blowing bubbles can be beautiful and heartwarming. Young people will remember this as an ethical experience.

Please pass the balloon bill with a ban on the release as well, that passed the House last year.

We support the ban on Neonics SB 190. This poison seems to be found in many places, our water, local stream and rivers. Much is in our drinking water and a high percent in our own bodies and the bodies of birds, mammals and pollinators.

We don't want our food and water contaminated since the poisons of Neonics can cause severe neurological damage. Parkinson's disease is thought to arise from pesticides. My Dad died of Parkinson's and his Doctor asked if he had ever worked on a farm. He did work on a farm while he was young.

To protect bees and the health of children and all Americans, we must switch from the extensive use of chemical pesticides.

We ask that the wording from last year's bill be re-instated to ban the non-agricultural use of Neonics.

Thank you.

We strongly oppose SB 196 An Act Concerning the Harvesting of Rabbits

There has been so much outcry over the years about more rabbits to be farmed for food in CT. How can we ignore people's pleas for these gentle creatures not to be bred to live in crowded, grated dirty cages, then cruelly subjected to ultimate slaughter. Most people think this is barbaric.

We protested in big groups at "Whole Foods" when they considered selling meat from rabbits. We had an amazing reception and a group of us were invited to stand right at the entrance to talk and leaflet to people. "Whole Foods" banished the plan to sell rabbits.

In Summary, farming more rabbits dooms these animals to cruel breeding, painful imprisonment and a death by having their necks being stretched to full length and dislocated. Or, the rabbit is struck a hard blow to the skull behind the ears. How can we do this to animals who people are delighted to see in the wild or adopted as their companion animal.

Thank you,

Karen Laski