Statement of Pierre Grzybowski
Deputy Manager, Fur-Free Campaign
The Humane Society of the United States
In Support of H.B. 834
Heard Before the Economic Matters Committee
March 6, 2008

On behalf of the more than 240,000 members and supporters of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) in Maryland, I would like to thank the Economic Matters Committee for the opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 834, legislation to protect consumers by requiring important and consistent labeling on garments sold in Maryland that include animal fur. My name is Pierre Grzybowski, and I am the deputy manager of the fur-free campaign of The HSUS. We strongly support the passage of H.B. 834, and thank Delegate Hucker for introducing this important consumer protection legislation.

This legislation will close a loophole and ensure that Maryland consumers—including those with allergies and ethical objections—have important and consistent information when making purchasing decisions. Consumers making well-informed decisions based on complete information is a cornerstone of a functioning market economy. Respected consumer groups Consumers Union and Consumer Action support H.B. 834.

Most fur garments are already labeled—this bill simply addresses the remainder.
A loophole in a federal law exempts about 1 in 7 fur-trimmed garments from having to reveal anything about the fur—it simply is not mentioned on the label.

This garment says nothing on the label about the real fur (visible on left) trimming the hood.

The loophole denies consumers the opportunity to make informed purchasing decisions.
Many garments—such as jackets, parkas, sweaters, vests, and hats—are trimmed with real fur. But if either the manufacturer's selling price of the finished garment *or merely the cost to the manufacturer of the fur pelts* (not including the cost of adding the fur trim to the garment) is $150 or less, the product does not have to be labeled and consumers are stuck guessing as to whether the fur is real, and if so, the species and country of origin. Consumers who have allergies to all fur (or just certain species), ethical objections to fur, a desire to buy American, or a preference for a certain species, cannot make informed purchasing decisions with unlabeled garments in the market.

Unlabeled garments—many of which are also falsely advertised—are a widespread problem.

Real fur garments, with no fur labeling, purchased in Maryland stores.

An ongoing investigation by The HSUS over the last two years has revealed that retailers including Nordstrom, Loehmann's, Rocawear, Bluefly, and Saks Fifth Avenue were selling falsely advertised and unlabeled fur-trimmed jackets. The brands involved included Oscar de la Renta, Rocawear, Marc New York, and Burberry. Several of these jackets were sold as "faux" fur when in fact they were raccoon dog, domestic dog, or rabbit fur. Others were advertised as "raccoon" or "rabbit" fur when in fact the fur was raccoon dog.

Other unlabeled real fur garments were found in Maryland stores including Burlington Coat Factory, Ross, and TJ Maxx, by brands including Sean John, Bill Blass, and Nicole Miller.

Manufacturing techniques exacerbate consumer confusion.
Dyeing animal fur pink, orange, or blue, or shearing it short can make the fur look fake and dupe consumers. In 2000, Congress banned the import of fur products made from domestic dogs and cats, but consumers are still wary that dog and cat fur is slipping into the U.S. on unlabeled jackets, dyed a different color. Consumers should be able to shop with confidence, and avoid any chance of buying dog or cat fur.

Real fur is dyed many unnatural colors. It can still be unlabeled.

Unlabeled fur-trimmed garments can cause allergic reactions.
New York Times health columnist Jane E. Brody, called fur a "notorious troublemaker" when it comes to allergies, and says "[g]ifts to be wary of include all real fur garments (including those with fur trim and sweaters containing rabbit hair)…" and in order "[t]o minimize problems for those who are sensitive, stick to fake furs…."[1]

According to a 2007 Gallup poll, 38% of Americans believe that "buying and wearing clothing made of animal fur" is "morally wrong"[2].

Profound welfare concerns surround unlabeled animal fur.

The raccoon dog is caged and killed by the millions in China, where the crude methods result in animals being skinned alive.[3] This fur is perhaps the most widely unlabeled and misrepresented species in the United States.

LEFT: A caged raccoon dog in China.

ABOVE: Skinned in China while still conscious, perhaps to trim unlabeled garments sold in Maryland

Labeling fur trim will not be economically burdensome for apparel manufacturers or retailers. According to the Federal Trade Commission (Federal Register 9/28/05), the total number of fur garments, fur-trimmed garments, and fur accessories sold in the United States is estimated at 3,500,000. Of that, approximately 3,000,000 items—or 86 percent—are already required to abide by labeling requirements. It will not present a difficulty to label the additional 14 percent of products using real fur, and it may actually increase the efficiency of the manufacturing process.

Consumer protection officials also support truthful, loophole-free, fur labeling.
The National Association of Consumer Agency Administrators (NACAA), an organization representing more than 160 government agencies and 50 corporate consumer offices, recently passed a resolution in support of truthful fur-labeling and advertising, including the elimination of loopholes.

The HSUS urges a favorable report on H.B. 834. Thank you for your consideration.

---

[1] "Health; Personal Health" by Jane E. Brody. New York Times, November 24, 1988. Available online http://tinyurl.com/ypvzhb March 5, 2008.
[2] "Americans Rate the Morality of 16 Social Issues" by Lydia Said. Gallup News Service, June 4, 2007. Available online http://tinyurl.com/2mcqoy March 5, 2008.
[3] "Fun Fur? A Report on the Chinese Fur Industry" by Hsieh-Yi, Yi-Chiao, Yu Fu, Mark Rissi and Dr Barbara Maas. Swiss Animal Protection, Care for the Wild, and EAST International, 2005. Available online http://tinyurl.com/2zxz99 March 5, 2008.