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August 21, 2008

Eldon Vail, Secretary
Department of Corrections
P.O. Box 41100, Mail Stop 41100
Olympia, WA 98504-1100

Dear Mr. Vail:

On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States and our over 228,800 members and supporters in Washington, we urge the Department of Corrections to immediately investigate allegations regarding the treatment of pheasants at the Pheasant Farm Program at the Washington State Penitentiary.

As you know, the birds are produced through a contract with the Department of Fish and Wildlife for its pheasant stocking season, during which the birds are released into the landscape for shooting purposes. For this reason, we have also contacted the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and urged their investigation into these allegations.

We were recently contacted by a relative of an inmate who reported distress over the recent death of approximately 1,000 birds due to overcrowding, heat exposure and improper care. This alarming report raises serious concerns about the potential for ongoing inhumane treatment of animals at the State Penitentiary and a similar program at the Coyote Ridge Correctional Facility, as well as the detrimental impact the program might have on inmate participants.

Our member described the birds as being crowded in two cages in over 100 degree weather and believed the stress of these practices caused the unnecessary death of the 1,000 birds. The member stated that program participants "hose the birds down" in an attempt to cool the stressed animals. The individual further described birds who have their beaks cut off and their eyesight impaired, and also reported that participants in the program feed the birds garbage.

The individual reporting to his family member described remorse that the birds were treated in such a way.

We know promoting empathy and compassion for animals translates into morally sound judgment for relationships with other humans. Research indicates, for example, that building empathy encourages "prosocial" behavior—behavior that has a positive social

Promoting the protection of all animals

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consequence.¹ Other research shows that empathy promotes "moral intelligence," the capacity to understand right from and wrong the ability to act on that understanding. A morally intelligent person makes decisions that benefit not only herself but also others around her.²

Conversely, we know that those who are cruel to animals are more likely to engage in all manner of criminal and anti-social behavior.³

Clearly, any effort to rehabilitate criminals is not only horribly undermined by an activity that promotes callousness and a disregard for the suffering for animals, but also is detrimental to those individuals that possess empathy for other living beings and are forced to participate in a program they view as cruelty to animals.

Beyond the inhumane treatment of the birds and questionable ability to provide adequate housing conditions, such as reported, we urge the Department to reconsider the Pheasant Farm Program operated through its partnership with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

We look forward to your prompt investigation and subsequent response to this letter.

Sincerely,



Inga Gibson
State Director
West Coast Regional Office
The Humane Society of the United States

CC: Dr. Jeffrey P. Koenings, Director, Department of Fish and Wildlife
Chief Bruce Bjork, Assistant Director Enforcement, WDFW
Sallie McCullough, City of Walla Walla, Animal Enforcement

¹ Eisenberg, N. (2003). Prosocial behavior, empathy, and sympathy. In M.H Bornstein & L. Davidson (Eds.), *Well-being: Positive development across the life course*. Crosscurrents in contemporary psychology (235-265). Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

² Borba, M. (2001). *Building moral intelligence: The seven essential virtues that teach kids to do the right thing*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.

³ Arluke, A., & Luke, C. (1997). Physical cruelty toward animals in Massachusetts, 1975-1996. *Society and Animals* 5(3), 195-204.