

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 18, 2006

Attention: Animal Welfare LA/Agriculture LA

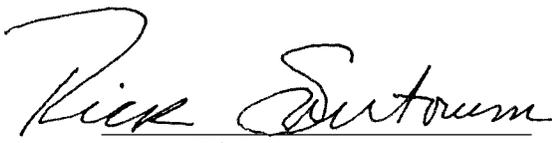
Dear Colleague:

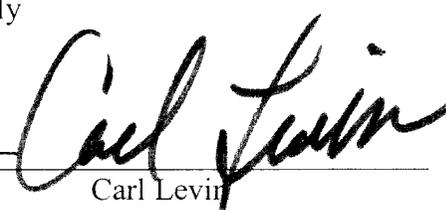
Congress has charged the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) with enforcing the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) and the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (HMSA), which are laws that require basic protections for millions of animals at more than 10,000 sites across the country, including medical laboratories, zoos, commercial breeding facilities commonly known as puppy mills, and slaughterhouses. However, these laws are only as effective as USDA's ability to enforce them.

We are pleased that Congress has responded in recent years by providing increased resources to address serious budget shortfalls for enforcement of these laws. We hope you will join us in signing the attached letter to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee requesting that they continue this worthwhile endeavor. It is important that we ensure that the USDA has the resources it needs to enforce these laws as the public expects.

If you wish to sign the attached letter, please notify Matt Beynon in Senator Santorum's office at 4-6324 or Kata Sybenga in Senator Levin's office at 4-9125 by May 8th.

Sincerely


Rick Santorum


Carl Levin

May __, 2006

The Honorable Robert Bennett, Chairman
The Honorable Herb Kohl, Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies
188 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Bennett and Ranking Member Kohl:

We are writing to thank you for your outstanding support during recent years for improved enforcement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) of key animal welfare laws and to urge you to sustain this effort in Fiscal Year 2007. Your leadership is making a great difference in helping to protect the welfare of millions of animals across the country. As you know, better enforcement will also benefit people by helping to prevent: 1) orchestrated dogfights and cockfights that often involve illegal gambling, drug trafficking, and human violence, and can contribute to the spread of costly illnesses such as Exotic Newcastle Disease and bird flu; 2) injuries to slaughterhouse workers from animals that are still conscious; 3) the sale of unhealthy pets by commercial breeders, commonly referred to as "puppy mills"; 4) laboratory conditions that may impair the scientific integrity of animal based research; 5) risks of disease transmission from, and dangerous encounters with, wild animals in or during public exhibition; and 6) injuries and deaths of pets on commercial airline flights due to mishandling and exposure to adverse environmental conditions. In order to continue the important work made possible by the FY 2006 budget, we request the following for FY 2007:

APHIS / Animal Welfare Act (AWA) Enforcement

We request that you support the President's request of \$19,142,640 for AWA enforcement under APHIS.

We commend the Committee for responding in recent years to the urgent need for increased funding for the Animal Care division to improve its inspections of more than 13,000 sites, including commercial breeding facilities, laboratories, zoos, circuses, and airlines, to ensure compliance with AWA standards. Animal Care now has 100 inspectors (with four vacancies that the agency is in the process of filling), compared to 64 inspectors at the end of the 1990s. We are pleased that the President's budget recommends an increase of \$1,481,420 (plus allowance for pay costs) to cover hiring 15 new staff to further improve AWA enforcement in FY 2007. This increase will enable the agency to handle additional responsibilities as the number of licensed/registered facilities has grown by 12% from FY 2004 to FY 2005.

APHIS / Investigative and Enforcement Services

We request that you support the President's request of \$11,738,430 for APHIS Investigative and Enforcement Services. We appreciate the Committee's consistent support for this division, which handles many important responsibilities including animal welfare. The President's budget recommends an increase of \$1,235,000 (plus allowance for pay costs) and 12 staff years for IES in FY 2007. A portion of this increase will be used to improve enforcement of federal animal welfare laws. In FY 2005, IES conducted 575 animal care investigations, with 169 cases resolved through either civil penalty stipulations or Administrative Law Judge decisions and a total of \$1.1 million assessed in fines (compared to 288 investigations and 97 cases resolved through stipulations or ALJ decisions and \$548,614 in fines during FY 2004).

Office of Inspector General / Animal Fighting Enforcement

We request sustained funding of \$800,000 for the Office of Inspector General to focus on enforcement of animal fighting laws (this amount is incorporated in the President's request for OIG base funding). We appreciate the inclusion of \$800,000 in each of the past three fiscal years for USDA's Office of Inspector General to focus on animal fighting cases. Congress first prohibited most interstate and foreign commerce of animals for fighting in 1976 and tightened loopholes in the law in 2002. Dogfighting and cockfighting are barbaric practices in which animals are drugged

to heighten their aggression and forced to keep fighting even after they've suffered grievous injuries. Animal fighting is almost always associated with illegal gambling, and also often involves illegal drug trafficking and violence toward people. Dogs bred and trained to fight endanger public safety, and some dogfighters steal pets to use as bait for training their dogs. Cockfighting was linked to an outbreak of Exotic Newcastle Disease in 2002-2003 that cost taxpayers more than \$200 million to contain. It's also been linked to the death of at least eight people in Asia reportedly exposed through cockfighting activity to bird flu. Given the potential for further costly disease transmission, as well as the animal cruelty involved, we believe it would be a sound investment for the federal government to continue its efforts to combat illegal animal fighting activity.

Food Safety and Inspection Service / Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (HMSA) Enforcement

We request sustained funding of no less than \$5,000,000 and no fewer than 63 staff years for HMSA enforcement (this amount is incorporated in the President's request for FSIS base funding) and continued funding of \$4,000,000 as provided in FY 2006 for further implementation of the new tracking system. We are grateful that Congress provided \$5 million in FY 2006 to sustain at least 63 full time equivalent positions dedicated solely to inspections and enforcement related to the HMSA, plus \$4 million to incorporate a new tracking system to ensure compliance with this law. The HMSA is designed to ensure that livestock are treated humanely and rendered unconscious before they are killed. The effort to target funds for this purpose was undertaken following reports of lax enforcement of the HMSA and animals being skinned, dismembered, and scalded while still alive and conscious. Implementation of the Humane Animal Tracking System is ongoing; continued funding of \$4 million will be used to equip remaining facilities.

Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service / Veterinary Student Loan Forgiveness

We request \$750,000 to continue a pilot program for the National Veterinary Medical Service Act, authorized in 2003, that received initial funding of \$500,000 in FY 2006. We appreciate that Congress has begun to address the critical shortage of veterinarians practicing in rural and inner-city areas, as well as in government positions such as at FSIS and APHIS. Having adequate veterinary care is a core animal welfare concern. There are only 70 veterinarians engaged in poultry practice to address the needs of approximately nine billion chickens raised each year in the U.S., and only 75 veterinarians addressing the needs of 30 million beef cattle and 102 million pigs, respectively. Veterinarians support our nation's defense against bioterrorism (the Centers for Disease Control estimate that 80% of potential bioterrorism agents are zoonotic – transmitted from animals to human). They are also on the front lines addressing public health problems associated with pet overpopulation, parasites, rabies, chronic wasting disease, bovine spongiform encephalopathy ("mad cow" disease), and a host of other concerns. Veterinary school graduates face a debt burden of \$80,000 on average, and the lowest pay of any of the medical professions, with an average starting salary of \$43,000. For those who choose employment in underserved rural or inner-city areas or public health practice, the National Veterinary Medical Service Act authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to forgive student debt. It also authorizes financial assistance for those who provide services during federal emergency situations such as disease outbreaks or disasters. We hope you will build on the initial funding provided last year to expand this needed program under CSREES or such other account as the Committee deems appropriate.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. We will be grateful for your leadership in ensuring that funds necessary to protect both animals and people will continue to be available.

Sincerely,

Rick Santorum

Carl Levin