

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 3, 2007

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

Dear Chairman Kohl and Ranking Member Bennett:

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 2008. 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 Committee's prior support, we request the following for FY 2008:

APHIS / Animal Welfare Act (AWA) Enforcement

We request that you support the President's request of \$21,126,000 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 eight 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 \$3,340,000 (plus allowance for pay costs) to cover hiring 21 new staff to further improve AWA enforcement in FY 2008. This increase will enable the agency to handle additional responsibilities as the number of licensed/registered facilities has grown by 13% from FY 2005 to FY 2006.

APHIS / Investigative and Enforcement Services

We request that you support the President's request of \$12,728,000 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 \$2,143,000 (plus allowance for pay costs) and 18 staff years for IES in FY 2008, of which \$291,000 and 3 staff years will be used to improve enforcement of federal animal welfare laws. In FY 2006, IES resolved 191 cases through either civil penalty stipulations or Administrative Law Judge decisions (compared to 169 cases resolved during FY 2005).

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 recent 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 nine 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. **We also hope language can be included directing the agency to report back to the Committee on specific federal animal fighting enforcement efforts undertaken during FY 2008.**

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 \$3,000,000 as provided in FY 2007 to maintain the new Humane Animal Tracking system. We are grateful that Congress provided \$5 million in FY 2007 to sustain at least 63 full time equivalent positions dedicated solely to inspections and enforcement related to the HMSA, plus \$4 million in FY 2006 and \$3 million in FY 2007 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.

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


We request \$1,000,000 to begin to fully implement the National Veterinary Medical Service Act (P.L. 108-161), specifically authorized in 2003, that received initial funding of \$500,000 in FY 2006 and an additional \$500,000 in FY 2007. 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. A study released in June 2006 demonstrated the acute and worsening shortage of veterinarians working in rural farm animal practice, while domestic pets in both rural and urban areas are often left without necessary medical care. 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 over \$100,000 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.

APHIS / Emergency Management Systems / Disaster Planning for Animals

We request that you support the President's request of \$1 million for Animal Care under APHIS' Emergency Management Systems line item. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita demonstrated that many people refuse to evacuate if they are forced to leave their pets behind. The Animal Care division has been asked to develop an infrastructure to help prepare for and respond to animal issues in a disaster and incorporate lessons learned from previous disasters. These funds will be used for staff time and resources to support state and local governments' and humane organizations' efforts to plan for protection of people with animals. The additional resources will enable the agency to participate, in partnership with FEMA, in the newly revised National Response Plan without jeopardizing other Animal Care programs.

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,


Elizabeth Dole


Carl Levin



Tom Harkin


Jack Reed


Mary Landrieu


Claire McCaskill


Bill Nelson


Barack Obama



Joseph I. Lieberman


David Vitter

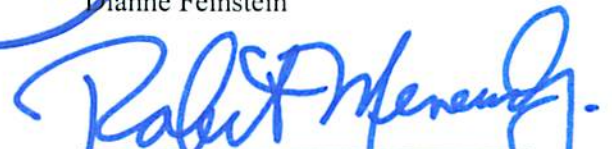

Benjamin Cardin


Russ Feingold


Sheldon Whitehouse

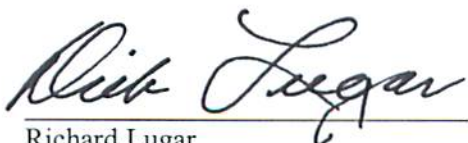

Dianne Feinstein



Norm Coleman


Robert Menendez


Charles Schumer


Richard Durbin


Richard Lugar


Amy Klobuchar

Daniel Akaka
Daniel Akaka

Barbara Boxer
Barbara Boxer

Maria Cantwell
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Bernard Sanders
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Ron Wyden

Sherrod Brown
Sherrod Brown

Gordon Smith
Gordon Smith

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John Warner

Olympia Snowe
Olympia Snowe

John Ensign
John Ensign

Debbie Stabenow
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Robert Casey, Jr.
Robert Casey

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Evan Bayh
Evan Bayh

Arlen Specter - Animal Welfare Funding
Arlen Specter