
Subject: FW: Opposition to UBCM Resolution NR75 – Support Responsible Exotic Animal Education and Stewardship

From: orion **Redacted**

Sent: Monday, September 1, 2025 7:36 PM

To: cityclerk <cityclerk@princegeorge.ca>

Subject: Opposition to UBCM Resolution NR75 – Support Responsible Exotic Animal Education and Stewardship

Dear Council,

As a resident of British Columbia, I strongly oppose and urge you to reject UBCM Resolutions NR75, calling stronger provincial regulations on educational Mobile Live Animal Programs (MLAPs) and revising the Controlled Alien Species regulations to introduce a Positive List, further prohibiting the importing, keeping, breeding, and transporting of all exotic species. While these changes may be well-intentioned, they would be catastrophic for animal welfare, scientific research, and responsible exotic animal stewardship in this province, resulting in an enormous step backwards.

It is critical to recognize that UBCM Resolution NR75 significantly harms responsible animal educators, conservation programs, scientific discovery and development, and pet keepers who are committed to responsible and ethical care, while doing very little to stop irresponsible or neglectful individuals who ignore regulations.

If implemented, these lists would grievously restrict opportunities for universities, colleges, and teaching facilities in B.C. to work with a variety of species. Students in biology, veterinary, and environmental sciences would lose critical hands-on experience with diverse animals, leaving them less prepared for careers in conservation, animal health, and scientific research. Limiting access to these species undermines the very foundation of higher learning and significantly weakens B.C.'s role as a leader in science-based animal care.

The suggestion that exotic animals inherently pose a major zoonotic or ecological risk is overstated. The overwhelming majority of zoonotic disease risks come from industrial agriculture — not small-scale educational programs or private pet ownership. Similarly, claims about invasiveness fail to acknowledge that B.C.'s climate renders most exotic species unable to establish wild populations. In the last 25 years, there have been 11 confirmed cases of Salmonella in BC related to reptiles. Aside from these 11 cases, there have been 0 confirmed cases of pet reptile related zoonotic disease or injuries in BC, making reptiles one of the safest pets.

Reptiles and amphibians are no more “impossible” to keep than the dogs, cats, parrots, and horses we have selectively bred for centuries, who also retain strong natural instincts and needs. Numerous scientific studies, veterinary research, experienced herpetologists and pet keepers confirm that reptiles can thrive in captivity when provided with appropriate husbandry. The widespread success of captive breeding programs, accounting for over 97% of pet snakes and 87% of pet lizards, demonstrates that responsible care practices are well-established and easily accessible. Multi-generational captive breeding has proven to produce animals better suited for captivity that have inheritable traits of reduced fear and aggression, ability to trust and recognize their caretakers. Many species of reptiles and

amphibians are kept as pets worldwide, supported by extensive literature, care guides, and veterinary protocols that ensure their health and welfare. This collective knowledge affirms that with proper education and resources, they are not inherently difficult to care for.

Banning MLAPs and exotic animal ownership will not end public interest or demand. Instead, it will drive these practices underground, making it impossible to monitor welfare, regulate husbandry, or ensure animals receive veterinary care. This is a dangerous precedent: history has shown that prohibition results in secrecy, neglect, and abandonment — not improved welfare.

MLAPS provide invaluable opportunities for education, outreach, and conservation awareness for animals the public does not encounter often. Reputable organizations use MLAPs to foster appreciation for animals, teach about biodiversity, and promote responsible ownership. Children and adults alike gain hands-on knowledge that cannot be replicated by books or videos. The programs are fundamental for inspiring curiosity, respect, and better care for animals. There are numerous studies regarding how animal educators and animal ambassadors are not only beneficial, but vital in gaining public interest, garnishing further support and funding necessary for conservation work. Some of these peer-reviewed and awarded studies include “The Impact of Ambassador Animal Facilitated Programs on Visitor Curiosity and Connections: A Mixed-Methods Study” by Shelley J. Rank Su-Jen Roberts, and Katherine Manion, and “Sssensational Snakes: Overcoming Fear by Inspiring Empathy.” By Karina Altman.

None of the 8 countries leading in animal welfare rely on Positive Lists. Countries like Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and Spain have tried using them, but these efforts all failed. The lists proved extremely costly, difficult to manage, and required constant amendments. These experiences show that Positive Lists are not effective in practice.

When large groups of animals are suddenly prohibited or restricted, abandonment rates increase dramatically. A study following Italy’s restrictions on turtles found that pets released into the wild tripled in the years following the ban, placing native ecosystems at risk and requiring expensive mitigation efforts from environmental authorities. The same is very likely in Canada, where many municipal governments are already overwhelmed with abandoned pets and have no facilities or staff qualified to handle reptiles, amphibians, or other exotic animals.

From a taxpayer standpoint, the establishment of either of these systems is extremely costly. Governments would need to invest heavily in new bureaucratic infrastructure to manage registration databases, process permits, train and employ compliance officers, conduct inspections, and enforce restrictions. This would likely involve creating new branches within provincial ministries or municipal animal control bodies, with associated salaries, benefits, vehicles, and office resources. The cost of developing and maintaining a national or provincial exotic animal registry alone, especially one that tracks detailed records, proof of acquisition dates, species-specific requirements, and permit renewals, would quickly run into the millions. The Netherlands, for example, spent years and significant public money refining their positive list model, only to be met with countless legal challenges and enforcement issues forcing them to abandon the framework.

Equally concerning is the timing and use of resources. British Columbia is already in crisis, with many residents struggling with urgent issues such as healthcare shortages, housing insecurity, wildfire recovery, and infrastructure needs. Diverting government attention, funding, and manpower to enforce sweeping bans on responsible exotic animal keepers is a gross misuse of public resources. These funds

and enforcement efforts should be directed toward solving real crises affecting thousands of families, not policing responsible hobbyists, educators, and animal professionals.

Implementing a Positive List will not eliminate demand or ownership — it will simply drive them underground. When people fear legal repercussions, they are less likely to seek veterinary care, proper support, or disclose of animals in need of surrender or rehoming. This leads to unseen suffering, as animals may languish in poor conditions, injured, ill, or abandoned, with no access to professionals who could help them.

I urge you to reject UBCM Solution NR75 and instead pursue evidence-based regulations that support responsible exotic animal stewardship, public education, and the welfare of the animals already in our communities. UBCM Solution NR75 is not a solution rooted in science or welfare. It is reactive, emotion-based legislation that ignores the real-world consequences to animals already in care, and those that will be acquired regardless of legality. Bans will not stop irresponsible people from keeping these animals, but they will stop them from doing it safely, openly, and humanely.

Thank you for your attention on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Tianna Gibbs, Worried Ball Python Hobbyist

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