

March 24, 2020

The Honorable Henry Stern  
California State Senate  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: **SUPPORT** - SB 376 Wildlife: prohibitions on possession, transportation, and importation of wild animals: live animal markets.

Dear Senator Stern:

I am writing to thank you for introducing SB 376, a bill to protect California's biodiversity from invasive species and disease and mitigate the danger wild animals pose to humans in transmitting zoonotic diseases, while also encouraging interstate cooperation in combatting wildlife trafficking.

SB 376 seeks to address the conditions which led, in part, to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, namely wildlife trafficking and trade. This bill requires the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), in consultation with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), to suspend import authorization for species linked to the transmission of a novel (new) zoonotic disease, such as COVID-19. CDFW's permitting for individual wild animals carrying disease is also clarified to allow permits where testing and treatments, including quarantine, are available. The bill also updates certain provisions related to wild animals and aquatic species to help ensure public transparency and CDFW's costs are covered. This bill sensibly revises the species of frogs, turtles and non-poultry birds eligible for live sale for human consumption to bar those shown to be either an invasive species or likely responsible for zoonotic transmission of disease. Lastly, SB 376 requires the CDFW to coordinate with Oregon, Washington, and other states on wildlife trafficking issues.

In SARS, MERS, and now COVID-19, initial human infection arose from viral transmission between wildlife and humans, such as bats and civets in the case of SARS. In California, the type of retail markets where wildlife is sold for human consumption which led to SARS and potentially COVID-19 do not exist in the same form. However, there is potential risk to human health from the importation of wild animals carrying viruses or other disease. Hundreds of permits authorizing the possession of live wild animals (so-called "restricted species") are issued by CDFW each year. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrates how important it is to fully evaluate the risks those animals pose to Californians.

California must take the lead in protecting ourselves and our state's native species by ensuring that CDFW exercises its authority over live wild animals to prevent a future pandemic, while still authorizing the presence of these animals in the state. In addition, there is increased recognition due to the COVID-19 pandemic that protecting consistently address disease transmission – not just the risks of an apex predator getting loose. CDFW's efforts must fit within the existing framework to protect public health from wild animals and fill in any gaps. Similarly, this public health protection focus has highlighted the need to ensure consistent treatment of certain aquatic species. CDFW and the Fish and Game Commission must have the tools and legislative direction needed to take appropriate action.

For these reasons, I thank you again for authoring SB 376 and urge your colleagues in the legislature to vote aye on this important measure.

Best regards and all our respect,