

Raymond Svider  
Partner, Chairman of BC Partners

Nikos Stathopoulos  
Partner, Private Equity, Chairman of the Portfolio Management Committee, Member of the Executive Committee

Jean-Baptiste Wautier  
Partner, Private Equity, Chairman of the Investment Committee, Member of the Executive Committee

CC:

J.K. Symancyk, CEO PetSmart  
Jim Persinger, President PetSmart Canada  
PetSmart Charities

Via email

April 11, 2022

**RE: Serious Concerns About Welfare of Animals Sold in PetSmart Stores**

Dear Mr. Svider, Mr. Stathopoulos, and Mr. Wautier,

Following the alarming reports from numerous PetSmart employees [about the mistreatment and deaths of animals at your stores](#), the undersigned US and Canadian animal protection and conservation organizations, veterinarians, and scientists urge you to (1) meet with the PetSmart Workers Committee to discuss their urgent concerns about the working conditions that are harmful to both workers and the animals in their care, and (2) take a significant step to aligning PetSmart's business practices with its values by phasing out the sale of reptiles and amphibians.

Workers describe their mental anguish of being discouraged from taking some sick animals to the vet and how the designated coolers in freezers often overflow with dead animals. Accounts also include the rampant spread of diseases between multiple tanks of fish, and of workers often having to address tanks where, sadly, every fish has died. According to workers, many stores lack backup generators, putting workers and animals in significant danger when the power goes out and workers must take care of animals without the electricity needed to keep workers safe and animals healthy.

PetSmart employees at stores across the US, including in Massachusetts, Tennessee, and Arizona, have revealed appalling conditions leading to animal neglect, such as:

- Severe understaffing and a lack of essential equipment, putting workers and animals in danger.
- Improper disposal of dead animals.
- Cost-cutting measures prioritizing profit over pet care.

As former PetSmart employee Lea Romo-Serrano shares, “Emotionally, it’s difficult to care for animals you know are needlessly suffering.” These are not isolated incidents but instead reveal a broken system that leaves animals sold in PetSmart stores vulnerable to suffering and neglect. Immediate action is needed to ensure no more animals die or suffer in PetSmart stores.

Additionally, PetSmart must re-evaluate the sale of animals in its stores and take a significant step to protecting animal welfare, public health, and the environment by phasing out the sale of reptiles and amphibians.

### **Animal Sales Undercut PetSmart’s Work with Shelters and Rescues**

Selling animals undermines the immense work that PetSmart Charities does on behalf of shelters and rescues to “connect pets with loving homes through adoption.” Animal sales push even more animals into already overwhelmed shelters.

Wild animals, such as reptiles and amphibians, are particularly challenging. And by marketing some reptiles and amphibians as “beginner” animals, the company sends the message that these animals require minimal care.<sup>1</sup> Forty-seven percent of first-time buyers spend a few hours—or none at all—researching prior to buying a wild animal, and 43% bought their first wild animal on a whim.<sup>2</sup> First-time pet parents are often completely unprepared for the level of care that reptiles and amphibians need. The result is that animals are surrendered to shelters that, in turn, struggle to find appropriate homes.

### **Animal Sales Driving the Destructive Wildlife Trade**

Selling reptiles and other wild animals as pets contributes to the destructive wildlife trade. A comprehensive review of the global trade in wild animals used as pets published in *Conservation Biology* found that “[i]nternational trade in exotic pets is an important and increasing driver of biodiversity loss and often compromises the standards required for good animal welfare.”<sup>3</sup> Even when animals are captive bred, selling wild animals contributes to population decline by increasing demand and thus the pressure to take animals from the wild.

Wild animals formerly kept as pets are also now a major cause of the spread of non-native species and have already resulted in the establishment of several hundred invasive animal species.<sup>4</sup> When people

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<sup>1</sup> For example, PetSmart’s [website](#) currently classifies the following reptile species as appropriate for people with a “beginner” experience level: very red bearded dragon, Cuban false chameleon, fancy corn snake, African sideneck turtle, red-eared slider, fancy bearded dragon, African dwarf frog, Bahaman anole, Pacman frog, bearded dragon, long-tailed lizard, leopard gecko, green tree frog, green anole, fancy leopard gecko, and eyelash crested gecko. Additionally, these reptile species are classified as “easy to handle:” fancy corn snake, juvenile fancy ball python, long-tailed lizard, leopard gecko, ball python, green anole, fancy leopard gecko, and eyelash crested gecko.

<sup>2</sup> 2018 Stratcom research commissioned by World Animal Protection.

<sup>3</sup> Emma R. Bush, Sandra E. Baker, and David W. Macdonald. *Global Trade in Exotic Pets 2006–2012*. *Conservation Biology*, 28(3). 2014. pp: 663-676. <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/cobi.12240>.

<sup>4</sup> Julie L Lockwood, Dustin J Welbourne, Christina M Romagosa, Phillip Cassey, Nicholas E Mandrak, Angela Strecker, Brian Leung, Oliver C Stringham, Bradley Udell, Diane J Episcopio-Sturgeon, Michael F Tlusty, James Sinclair, Michael R Springborn, Elizabeth F Pienaar, Andrew L Rhyne, and Reuben Keller. *When pets become pests: the role of the exotic pet trade in producing invasive vertebrate animals*. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, 17(6). 2019. pp: 223-230. <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/fee.2059>.

discover how challenging it is to maintain wild animals, they frequently abandon them into unfamiliar habitats. Some animals will die quickly, killed by predators or from starvation. Other animals adapt and breed, altering and threatening local ecosystems. In an effort to protect their environments, multiple states have already banned the sale or possession of animals sold in PetSmart stores such as red-eared sliders and Quaker parakeets.

We urge you to take these concerns and employee reports seriously and act swiftly.

Sincerely,

Liz Cabrera Holtz, Wildlife Campaign Manager  
World Animal Protection US

Michèle Hamers, Wildlife Campaign Manager  
World Animal Protection Canada

Animal Defenders International  
Christina Scaringe, General Counsel

Animal Justice  
Camille Labchuk, Executive Director, Animal Justice

Animal Legal Defense Fund

Avian Welfare Coalition

Born Free USA  
Angela Grimes, CEO

CATCA Environmental and Wildlife Society / International Aid For Animals Foundation  
Ericka Ceballos, CEO and Founder

Chicago Alliance for Animals

Colorado Reptile Humane Society  
Ann-Elizabeth (AE) Nash, PhD

DC Voters for Animals

Defend Them All Foundation  
Lindsey Zehel, Esq., LL.M., Executive Director

Endangered Species Coalition

Exotic Avian Sanctuary of Tennessee

Friends of Philip Fish Sanctuary

Foster Parrots, Ltd. & The New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary

Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries

Harvard Animal Law Society

International Wildlife Conservation Natural Resources Defense Council  
Zak Smith, Senior Attorney, Director

Northeast Avian Rescue

Save the Frogs  
Dr. Kerry Kriger, Ecologist and Founder & Executive Director

Vancouver Humane Society  
Amy Morris, Executive Director

Voice for Animals  
Tove Reece, Executive Director

Voters for Animal Rights

Wildlife Rescue and Conservation Association (ARCAS), Guatemala  
Colum Muccio, Development Director

**Veterinarians, scientists, and other experts:**

Dr. Alix Wilson, DVM, Medical Director, Center for Avian & Exotic Medicine

Jonathan Balcombe, PhD, biologist and best-selling author

Dr. Rosemary Collard, Assistant Professor, Geography Department, Simon Fraser University

Amy Fitzgerald, Professor of Criminology, Department of Sociology, Anthropology & Criminology,  
University of Windsor

Dr. Ken Langelier, OBC DVM

Anthony Pilny, DVM, DABVP (Avian Certified)

Erin Robinson, Operations Manager, ASPCA

John Sorenson, Professor, Department of Sociology, Brock University