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Representative Amy Sheldon, Chairwoman  
Representative James McCullough, Vice Chairman  
Representative Harvey Smith, Ranking Member  
House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife  
Vermont General Assembly  
115 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05633

### **Re: Support for An Act Relating to Hunting and Trapping (H. 172)**

Chairwoman Sheldon, Vice Chairman McCullough, Ranking Member Smith, and honorable members of the House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife,

On behalf of the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) and our supporters in Vermont, thank you for this opportunity to submit a letter of support for *An Act Relating to Trapping and Hunting* (H. 172). We thank Representative James McCullough for his leadership on wildlife protections and for introducing this important legislation. We respectfully urge the Committee to support H. 172 to prohibit cruel and unnecessary trapping, as well as prevent the cruel use of dogs in hunting black bears.

ALDF is the nation's preeminent legal advocacy organization for animals. The organization's mission is to protect the lives and advance the interests of animals through the legal system. We are working nationwide to combat particularly cruel methods of killing wildlife across multiple legal channels.

H. 172 would protect Vermont's wildlife in several ways, including by (1) prohibiting trapping of furbearing animals unless conducted by a licensed nuisance wildlife control officer or by a homeowner if the targeted animal is found in the act of destroying property or attacking animals on the property, including companion animals and farmed animals, (2) establishing a "nuisance" wildlife trapping license and associated training course, and (3) prohibiting the cruel use of dogs in hunting black bears (or "bear hounding"). Every year, countless numbers of animals are maimed or killed by traps. Trapped animals frequently suffer slow, painful deaths; some animals even chew off their own limbs in a desperate attempt to free themselves.

#### **Traps are indiscriminate and cruel**

Traps don't discriminate — companion animals and endangered or threatened species can be killed or injured by these cruel devices. Trapped animals often endure extreme cruelty, suffering from dehydration, starvation, and broken bones, and can be vulnerable to attack by other animals. Wild animals who survive until the trapper returns may ultimately be bludgeoned or choked to death, or otherwise cruelly killed.

**All our clients are innocent**

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Trapping to prevent “nuisance” wildlife is often ineffective, and for some species can actually stimulate population growth. Because traps are indiscriminate, there is no guarantee they will capture the target individual “nuisance” animal or even the intended species. Even if a target individual is trapped, in many cases, removing that one animal can simply open up the opportunity for another to move in. Alternative, non-lethal methods for addressing conflicts with wildlife, such as use of certain devices designed to frighten wildlife away, repellents, or methods of exclusion, are often more effective. Proper training on these techniques and devices can help officials identify the root cause of conflicts and implement long term, species-specific solutions that protect wildlife, public safety, and property interests.

The wildlife trapping education course required by H.172 would include training or education on site evaluation, nonlethal methods of wildlife conflict resolution (e.g. repellants, exclusions, habitat modification, etc.), techniques and measures to prevent wildlife conflicts, and specific conditions and methods approved for lethal control of “nuisance” wildlife.

Every year, companion animals are caught in traps in Vermont. For example, in 2018, a dog was caught in a trap at a popular dog walking location in Waterford, and another dog was caught in a trap just barely beyond the driveway to the private property in Shaftsbury. In 2017, a cat named Drei was caught in a conibear trap in Burlington for over a week before he was found and rushed to a veterinarian, who was unable to save one of Drei’s paws. In trying to free scared companion animals from these painful traps, people have suffered biting injuries. From 2009 to 2014, at least 35 companion animals were caught in traps, seven of whom died as a result. The actual number may be much higher, since reporting was not required at the time. In 2018, the first year reporting was required, at least nine dogs and two cats were reported to Vermont’s Fish and Wildlife Department.

### **Bear hounding hurts bears, dogs, and people**

Using dogs to hunt bears — bear hounding — involves packs of radio-collared dogs chasing down a bear often until the bear is exhausted and cornered in a tree. Sometimes, however, frightened bears will attack pursuing dogs, resulting in injuries or death for both dogs and bears. When mother bears are killed, her cubs are orphaned and may die from starvation or predation. Every year, “hounding” dogs are killed or injured by bears fighting for their lives, and some of these dogs are abandoned in the woods or otherwise wind up at animal shelters, and some are even killed if they are no longer considered useful or are considered too expensive to feed out of season.

Public opposition for bear hounding is overwhelming. Many hunters themselves have expressed concern over the “unsportsmanlike” and “unfair” practice. A person using dogs to hound bears may be sitting in their car or truck, sometimes miles away. Property owners often suffer damage to their property, or companion animals or farmed animals on their property may be injured or stressed by dogs used for hounding, who cannot respect property lines or “no hunting” postings. Hikers or other bystanders risk being attacked. In one particularly jarring incident in 2019, dogs being used for bear hounding attacked a couple and their puppy on a Catamount public hiking trail. The couple and puppy sustained serious injuries before the person who had sent their dogs into the woods to hound bears was able to intervene over thirty minutes later.

### **H. 172 aligns with Vermont values**

If passed, H. 172 would reinforce Vermont’s role as a leader in wildlife protection. Numerous states, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island and Washington, have limited or banned certain types of traps, due to concerns about public safety and animal cruelty.

A recent survey conducted by the University of Vermont Center for Rural Studies revealed that nearly two-thirds of Vermonters support banning the use of steel jaw leghold, body gripping and any types of drowning traps. Vermont should seize this opportunity to more closely align Vermont's laws with its values and advance H. 172 out of committee.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Stephanie Harris

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