



14 March 2017

The following statement was generated by and represents the official position of Stahl Exotic Animal Veterinary Services (SEAVS) in regards to considered amendments to Arlington's county code as it pertains to keeping exotic animals.

SEAVS is a veterinary clinic located in Fairfax County and dedicated to promoting the health and responsible care of exotic animal companions in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan region since 2003. Its veterinarians and staff are some of the forerunners in the field, with contributions to both exotic animal pet medicine and wildlife medicine.

As experts in the field of veterinary medicine, animal health and welfare, the human-animal bond, and public health, we would like to express our grave concerns with the proposed revisions to Arlington's county code as it pertains to exotic animals. **We support the code as it currently stands, and recommend that no changes be made.** However, should revision be considered necessary, we would urge clarification or reconsideration of specific sections as follows:

- The draft changes to Article V, Sections 2-18 through 2-20 include the insertion of "wild or exotic animals." *This new definition is too broad and includes a number of species very commonly kept as pets and not normally falling under this category.*
 - Specifically, *hedgehogs and sugar gliders should not be included in the definition of "wild or exotic animals,"* as these species have been captive bred and kept as pets safely and humanely for decades, and are many generations distant from their wild counterparts.
 - A plain reading of the proposed definition would include any "warm-blooded animal... or reptile... that can normally be found in the wild state." This language creates a definition so broad that it includes a great many animal companion species that have been bred and kept in captivity safely and humanely for years, such as pet birds and lizards. *This vague language must be clarified, and individual species of concern listed, for as it stands, this could include many common pet species.*
 - The phrase referring to "reptiles" could be misconstrued to include commonly kept pets such as bearded dragons and geckos. *If this was intended to refer only to poisonous reptiles, the wording should be clarified. Otherwise, we urge that the term be removed entirely.*
- *We strongly disagree with the added prohibition of "any snake exceeding four (4) feet in length," which excludes most of the gentle and commonly kept pet snakes, such as many ball pythons, corn*

snakes, and boas. Keeping venomous snakes is already prohibited in Virginia, and there are few snake species kept in captivity and reaching exceedingly large sizes to be of concern to people. If ensuring human health and safety is the underlying goal of such a code amendment, then experts should be consulted to more specifically identify those species that might be of concern.

It is important to understand that similar exotic animal codes upheld in surrounding counties (e.g. Fairfax County) do not prohibit many of the species targeted by the proposed changes to Arlington's county code. In fact, some of these counties have become more friendly toward the keeping of exotic pets in recent years in direct response to the needs of constituents. **These urban areas support apartment living and busy lifestyles often not conducive to the keeping of dogs and cats. The human-animal bond offered by exotic pets is a wonderful and fulfilling alternative, as they are able to be kept humanely and safely in such an environment.**

Approximately 10-20% of American households include exotic animal companions, and we estimate that this statistic holds true in the Arlington area. As a result, a great many residents in Arlington County would be adversely affected by the proposed county code changes. As members of the Virginia veterinary community and professional advocates for exotic animals and the human-animal bond, we are certain that **Arlington County would suffer as a result of the adoption of such codes and the resultant dissatisfaction of many constituents who are exotic animal pet owners within their community.** It is also anticipated that should people comply with the law, the requirement that residents register their exotic pets would generate a tremendous amount of needless work for the county.

It is strongly recommended that the code remain as it currently stands, or that any prohibitions or changes focus on animals that pose a real health and safety risk, such as non-human primates, large felidae species, and poisonous reptiles. **We would also suggest that any and all future revisions to county legal code involving animals include from the start known experts in the relevant fields to draft a clear and logical policy based on facts.**

Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns. Please know that we speak as advocates of and experts in the areas of animal health and welfare, the human-animal bond, and public health. More specifically, we advocate for the many Arlington County residents who share with us a passion for safely and humanely keeping and appreciating exotic pets as fulfilling and wonderful animal family members.

Sincerely,

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