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Wild Animal  
Welfare Program

April 4, 2026

Committee on Parks and Recreation  
New York City Council  
250 Broadway, 8th Floor  
New York, NY 10007

Re: Support for Int. 0806 – The creation of a citywide wildlife management plan

Dear Chair Hankerson and Members of the Committee:

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this written testimony<sup>1</sup> in support of Int. 0806, which would establish a wildlife management advisory board to develop a citywide wildlife management plan. We commend Council Member Wong and the co-sponsors for introducing this legislation, which would represent an important step toward a more coordinated, evidence-based, and humane approach to wildlife management in the city.

We write in our capacity as researchers at New York University whose work focuses on urban wild animal welfare science, local environmental law and policy, and the ethical dimensions of human-wildlife interactions. Through the Department of Environmental Studies,<sup>2</sup> the Center for Environmental and Animal Protection (CEAP),<sup>3</sup> the NYU Wild Animal Welfare Program (WAWP),<sup>4</sup> and the NYU Wildlife Inclusive Local Development Lab (WILD Lab),<sup>5</sup> we conduct research on the welfare of free-living animals in urban environments and on the role of local government in addressing these issues; this includes ongoing research focused specifically on wildlife and environmental policy in New York City.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not purport to represent the views, if any, of their respective institutions. Institutional affiliations are provided solely for identification purposes.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Environmental Studies, New York University, <https://as.nyu.edu/departments/environment.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Center for Environmental and Animal Protection, New York University, <https://enviroanimal.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> Wild Animal Welfare Program, New York University, <https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/wildanimalwelfare>.

<sup>5</sup> Wildlife Inclusive Local Development (WILD) Lab, Wild Animal Welfare Program, New York University, <https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/wildanimalwelfare/wild-lab>.

<sup>6</sup> Our ongoing projects include: the development of a public-facing mapping application documenting urban wildlife and environmental conditions across NYC; the creation of scientific and technical guidance for assessing wild animal welfare in urban environments; a policy analysis of evidence-based options for managing human-wildlife

New York City is home to a remarkable diversity of wildlife. As the city continues to grow, and as it continues to focus efforts on promoting local biodiversity, natural resources, and green spaces, the need for a comprehensive wildlife plan has become increasingly urgent. Currently, there is no unified framework for managing or studying the city’s wildlife populations across agency jurisdictions. Int. 0806 would address this gap by establishing a structured process for developing a citywide plan that accounts for public health and safety, promotes biological diversity, and requires the use of the most humane treatment of wild animals feasible. This legislation is well-conceived and we support its core objectives.

We are particularly pleased to see the bill’s inclusion of “the most humane treatment of wildlife feasible”<sup>7</sup> as a guiding principle for the development of the citywide plan. This language recognizes that how individual animals are treated in the course of wildlife management matters, not only as a matter of public values, but also as a matter of science. Research in animal welfare science has demonstrated that a large number of urban wild animals are sentient beings capable of experiencing pain, stress, and fear, and that management interventions can have significant effects on individual animal well-being.<sup>8</sup> These findings are consistent with a recent declaration by more than 500 experts across the world that there is “strong scientific support for attributions of conscious experience to other mammals and to birds,” and that “the empirical evidence indicates at least a realistic possibility of conscious experience in all vertebrates.”<sup>9</sup> The bill’s recognition of this dimension distinguishes it from approaches that are purely conservation- or population-focused, and reflects a more comprehensive understanding of what responsible urban wildlife management entails.

Based on our expertise in this area, we respectfully offer the following recommendations to strengthen the bill’s welfare provisions and ensure the advisory board is well-equipped to fulfill its mandate.

**First, we recommend that the bill require at least one member of the advisory board to have expertise in wild animal welfare science.** As currently drafted, the bill requires at least one academic member with “advanced specialized training in the management of wildlife in an

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conflict in cities; the development of policy guidance for integrating wild animal welfare considerations into local government decisionmaking processes (focusing on NYC); and empirical studies focused on the welfare impacts of bird-window collisions in NYC.

<sup>7</sup> Int. No. 806, N.Y.C. Council, § 18-169(f)(4), (7) (2026).

<sup>8</sup> Heather Browning & Walter Veit, [The Sentience Shift in Animal Research](#), 28 *New Bioethics* 299 (2022); Andrew Crump et al., [Sentience in Decapod Crustaceans: A General Framework and Review of the Evidence](#), 32 *Animal Sentience* 1 (2022); David Baracchi and Luigi Baciadonna, [Insect Sentience and the Rise of a New Inclusive Ethics](#), 29 *Animal Sentience* 1 (2020); Jonathan Birch et al., LSE Consulting, [Review of the Evidence of Sentience in Cephalopod Molluscs and Decapod Crustaceans](#) (2021); Jonathan Birch, [Animal Sentience and the Precautionary Principle](#), 16 *Animal Sentience* 1 (2017).

<sup>9</sup> THE NEW YORK DECLARATION ON ANIMAL CONSCIOUSNESS, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY (Apr. 19, 2024), <https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/nydeclaration/declaration>.

urban setting” and one member with five or more years of experience “working with wildlife in urban settings.” These are important qualifications, but neither requires specific training in animal welfare science. Wild animal welfare is a distinct discipline from wildlife management or conservation biology, one that focuses on evaluating and improving the conditions experienced by individual animals.<sup>10</sup> Given that the bill expressly calls for strategies that use the most humane treatment of wildlife feasible, the advisory board would benefit from including someone trained to assess what “humane treatment” means in practice. Without this expertise, there is a risk that the plan’s welfare provisions remain aspirational rather than operational. Notably, researchers and institutions in New York City are actively conducting welfare-focused research on urban wildlife, and qualified experts are readily available to serve in such a capacity.

**Second, we recommend that the bill provide additional guidance on the meaning of “the most humane treatment of wildlife feasible.”** While this standard is a welcome inclusion, it is not defined in the bill, and its interpretation could vary significantly depending on who is applying it. An agency could, for example, determine that only lethal control methods are “feasible” even when effective non-lethal alternatives exist but are more costly or logistically complex. To strengthen this provision, the bill could direct the advisory board to evaluate management interventions in light of current scientific understanding of animal welfare and to consider a hierarchy of methods that prioritizes non-lethal and non-invasive approaches where effective alternatives are available. This would provide a more meaningful standard without being overly prescriptive.

**Third, we recommend broadening the plan’s scope beyond “wildlife management problems” to consider conditions affecting the well-being of wild animals.** The bill’s current framing centers on identifying and addressing “significant wildlife management problems,” which risks channeling the plan toward a reactive, conflict-driven approach. While addressing human-wildlife conflicts is without a doubt important, a comprehensive citywide plan for managing wildlife should also consider the conditions experienced by wildlife in the city more broadly; this includes the effects of urbanization, habitat fragmentation, pollution, and climate change on individual animals. This approach would be consistent with the bill’s own provisions on humane treatment and with emerging frameworks in urban ecology and conservation biology that recognize the importance of holistic and proactive approaches in managing wildlife.

To achieve this, the bill could include an additional element under subdivision (f) requiring an assessment of the conditions affecting the well-being of wild animals in the city, drawing on

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<sup>10</sup> Animal welfare science is a multidisciplinary field that draws on ethology, veterinary science, neuroscience, and applied biology to evaluate the physical and psychological states experienced by individual animals. It is distinct from wildlife management, which focuses primarily on population-level objectives, and conservation biology, which focuses on species and ecosystem preservation, though all three fields can inform one another. For further discussion on the distinction between welfare-focused approaches and traditional conservation and management approaches, see Alisa White et al., [Wild Animal Welfare in Local Policies on Land Use and the Built Environment](#), Guarini Ctr. on Env’t, Energy & Land Use Law (Mar. 12, 2024).

best-available methods for evaluating animal well-being in urban environments. Alternatively, it could broaden existing elements under subdivision (f) to better consider animal well-being. For example:<sup>11</sup>

1. An analysis of significant wildlife management problems, **including consideration of how ongoing and anticipated changes to conditions in the urban environment may affect the welfare of wildlife.**

2. Strategies to promote biological diversity, ~~and~~ healthy wildlife distribution, **and the welfare of wildlife;** ...

4. A description of proposed strategies to address wildlife management problems that use the most humane treatment of wildlife feasible, **informed by current scientific understanding of animal welfare;** ...

7. A description of particular actions proposed to be undertaken by each agency in furtherance of the wildlife management plan that use the most humane treatment of wildlife feasible, **informed by current scientific understanding of animal welfare;**

**Fourth, we recommend strengthening the cross-agency consideration mandate in subdivision (i).** The bill’s requirement that all agencies “consider the effect that their initiatives, actions, policies and programs have on wildlife” is a commendable provision with potentially far-reaching implications. However, without an accompanying documentation or reporting requirement, it may be difficult to determine whether agencies are meaningfully complying with this mandate. We would suggest requiring agencies to prepare brief documentation assessing impacts on wild animal well-being in connection with major projects or policy changes. This would give the mandate practical effect, as well as provide useful data for the City—including facilitating the Department of Parks and Recreation’s annual reporting requirement—and promote greater public transparency.

Finally, we wish to note that our team at NYU would be glad to serve as a resource to the Committee and to the future advisory board as this legislation moves forward. As mentioned above, we have ongoing scientific and policy research efforts focused specifically on New York City, including applied research on wildlife welfare assessment methods and the development of a public-facing mapping tool for NYC wildlife and environmental data. We would also welcome the opportunity to provide additional testimony to the Committee about this work, if desired.

We thank you again for your leadership and for considering our comments in your deliberations.

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<sup>11</sup> Suggested revisions are shown in **bold**.

Sincerely,

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