

Dear Senator Kerschen and Members of the Committee,

I, Brandon Sokol, Animal Control Officer for the City of Manhattan Kansas, am a proponent for SB 269, a bill to ban private ownership of wolves and non-human primates in Kansas.

Thank you for asking me about my experience with exotic animals in consideration to SB 269. My department had a major problem with an individual owning wolf and wolf-hybrids back in 2006. It took my predecessors five years to shut down his wolf-hybrid operations in the County. The individual's inability to control his animals ultimately spilled into the City of Manhattan because these animals were feral which means untamed or a "domesticated" animal that reverts to its wild behaviors due to inadequate training or human interaction. This individual moved his operations to several sites within Riley, Pottawatomie, and Wabaunsee Counties to evade local law enforcement. After trying to stop him for these five years, the State finally intervened in 2006. Most of his wolf and wolf-hybrids were deemed to be starving, and feral. The State euthanized 40 of the animals on a property at the corner of Marlatt and Cindella which is only a few blocks from Susan B. Anthony Middle School in Manhattan. Several of the animals escaped during the State operation, and Animal Control was notified. Most of the animals were caught shortly after, but one female made it all the way into town near Bergman Elementary and then Sunset Cemetery, where it roamed for about a week. One night the evening ACO was called to assist Riley County PD after the animal was spotted by a pedestrian. A few days later, after another incident involving the animal, the high school was alerted and instructed to keep the students inside the building. This animal was followed in the Sunset Cemetery, adjacent to the High School West, where it was darted. The animal was chased from Sunset Cemetery through several residential neighborhoods until it was sedated. The animal was immediately put down. This animal was certainly an imminent threat to anyone who is not properly trained or processing the proper PPE. The City of Manhattan addressed the issue by prohibiting private ownership of wolf and wolf-hybrid animals under the Code of City Ordinances Section 6-7.

In 2020 the city of Manhattan experienced another issue with exotic animals after two American alligators escaped or were set loose when a small business dealing with exotic reptiles was vandalized. The two alligators, one measuring 4 foot the other 5 foot, somehow made it into Wildcat creek, a shallow waterway that runs through Manhattan adjacent to a pathed walking/biking trail. The City responded by shutting down the trail in the area where the alligators were seen. Animal Control was not trained or prepared to handle these animals. The animals were not considered an immediate threat to public safety, and animal control officers were instructed not to get involved. Therefore the securing of these animals was left up to the store owner. It was apparent that the store owners were also not trained or capable of securing the animals. The animals remained loose for several weeks until one died in a trap, and the other was captured by a pedestrian.

As exciting as owning an exotic animal may be, ordinary members of the public and their respective jurisdictions do not have the tools, equipment and resources necessary to adequately safeguard the public from the risks associated with improper housing, transport or disposal of these animals. The best solution for such jurisdictions is to prohibit their ownership, and in cases where such jurisdiction lacks such tools, the State should provide recourse to deal with these situations.

Oftentimes exotic animal owners are people who are not able to understand the scope and responsibilities associated with these animals, and are a challenge to the safety and health of others. I feel that the State does have an interest in making sure that situations like these do not occur, and that

there are procedures, tools, and laws that are uniform to prevent these kinds of situations from occurring in the future. It is my opinion that local governments should decide how to keep their citizens safe, and for the States to have laws that bring about uniformity and simplicity to the administration and enforcement of animal laws.

My expertise is on the enforcement of animal law, and field experience with individuals who I have come in contact with in cases involving particular exotics such as wolves and Alligators. Ownership of these exotics should be limited to accredited organizations, such as zoos or government licensed facilities. Likewise, law enforcement tools and management of these exotic species should be uniform across the state with law enforcement agencies given proper guidance, and in the absence of local laws, that the State Law may be used to safeguard the public across jurisdictions.

I appreciate your time and consideration over the matter.

sincerely,

Brandon Sokol