

Presented by: Stephen Kaspar

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Topic: Proposal to Permit Ownership of Pet Raccoons in Kansas

Opening Statement

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Stephen Kaspar, and I am here to present a proposal for the regulated legalization of raccoons as domesticated pets in Kansas. I am sure you are wondering why I am testifying in front of you today. I wrote the proposal that is now the bill being presented to you today.. I have spent the last 4 years feeding and training wild raccoons which led to me researching if this could be made legal. It is a passion of mine to make this legal for others to enjoy. This initiative is designed to ensure responsible ownership while maintaining public safety, animal welfare, and environmental integrity.

Raccoons, often perceived solely as wildlife, have increasingly demonstrated their adaptability, intelligence, and affectionate nature when raised in controlled domestic environments. The USDA adopted the legal change through the AWA Act to allow bred raccoons in 1966. Currently, 19 States allow private USDA bred raccoon ownership under various regulatory frameworks. States surrounding Kansas allows this, including Oklahoma, Nebraska, Texas and MO, and have already implemented successful regulatory models, proving that responsible raccoon ownership is both practical and safe. Kansas should be part of this growing trend!

(<https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/pet-raccoon-legal-states>)

(<https://www.nal.usda.gov/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-welfare-act>)

Because there is so much misinformation, I think it is important to make note of what a domestic animal is. The term domesticated animal refers to species

that have undergone a process of domestication, resulting in genetic and behavioral changes that distinguish them from their wild ancestors.

Domestication involves selective breeding over generations to emphasize traits beneficial to humans, such as tameness, adaptability to captivity, and reduced aggression. This process leads to permanent genetic modifications, making domesticated animals distinct from their wild counterparts. This has been occurring with raccoons under the USDA since 1966 and there are several new “breeds” and colorations that are not found in the wild. A DNA would reveal a domesticated raccoon’s DNA is different than their “wild” relatives.

K.S.A 28-1-14 subsection C states “(c) Except as permitted by the secretary, attempts to immunize skunks, coyotes, raccoons, foxes, and other wildlife mammals known to be involved in the transmission of rabies shall be prohibited.”

Additionally, K.S.A. 21-6411 subsection “D” states "wild animal" means a living mammal or marsupial which is normally found in the wild state, but shall not include a farm animal

21-6411 subsection E then goes on to define a domestic pet as "domestic pet" means any domesticated animal which is kept for pleasure rather than utility.

USDA Bred Raccoons are not wild animals as established by the above and therefore are already considered a “Domestic animal” in the state of KS.

Addressing Potential Concerns

Raccoons are considered a Rabie Vector Species (RSV). However, the CDC has only one reported case of any raccoon giving a human rabies. It should be noted this was a wild raccoon, not a USDA Domestic Raccoon.

(<https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/what-do-about-raccoons>)

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) tracking of rabies in “wild” raccoons in KS for the last several years reveals zero cases of a raccoon testing positive for rabies.

(<https://avmajournals.avma.org/view/journals/javma/262/11/javma.24.05.0354.xml>)

Less than 10 people a year contract rabies from any wild animal
(<https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/php/protecting-public-health/index.html>)

There are no cases of a USDA bred raccoon exposing their owner to rabies on record. This is due to the strict USDA regulation and controlled breeding environment, regular veterinary care and preventive measures by both the breeder and the pet's owner.

I understand that concerns may arise regarding public safety, environmental impact, and health risks. However, the regulatory framework I am proposing directly addresses these issues:

Public Safety: Secure housing and mandatory permits would prevent escapes and minimize risks to the community.

Wildlife Impact: Banning wild capture and strictly regulating ownership would ensure that raccoon populations remain stable in their natural habitats.

Health Risks: Mandatory vaccination and veterinary care requirements would eliminate major zoonotic threats, such as rabies transmission

I designed this proposal from several states that already allows this adopting the methodology of safety for the public and owner but also the well being of the raccoon. This isn't just about vaccines and care, it is also designed to enhance their life and wellbeing. I did not design this to be easy for the public to acquire one, rather I designed it to attract responsible pet owners.

Key points of the bill

1. Permits would require proof of adequate housing, veterinary care, and compliance with USDA breeding regulations.
2. The program would include pre-ownership education and training, ensuring that prospective owners fully understand their responsibilities.
3. Strict Health and Vaccination Guidelines

4. Enclosure and Care Standards

5. Owners must provide safe, secure, and species-appropriate enclosures to prevent escapes and ensure animal welfare.

6. Raccoons require a specialized diet, socialization, and enrichment, all of which would be regulated through ownership guidelines.

7. Ethical Sourcing from USDA-Licensed Breeders

8. To prevent wildlife exploitation, raccoon ownership would be limited strictly to animals purchased from USDA-licensed breeders.

9. The capture of wild raccoons would remain illegal, ensuring local wildlife populations remain undisturbed.

10. Regulatory inspections and reporting mechanisms would be implemented to monitor compliance and prevent illegal ownership.

11. The permit process would create an ROI for the state on day one.

12. Public awareness and education programs would ensure that owners and the general public understand proper care and responsible ownership.

13. Statewide Regulation to Prevent Local Discrepancies

14. This proposal includes a preemption clause, ensuring that pet raccoon ownership is regulated at the state level, preventing confusing or inconsistent local ordinances.

Conclusion

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee,

Kansas has the opportunity to modernize its laws in a way that promotes responsible pet ownership while safeguarding public and environmental health. With 19 states already permitting pet raccoon ownership, we have clear evidence that proper regulation can ensure public safety and animal welfare. The framework outlined in this proposal draws from successful

models in other states and ensures that raccoon ownership is ethical, regulated, and safe.

The thoroughness of this bill takes the best of the legal states and sets a new standard by KS on raccoon ownership. Furthermore, with the fees involved it will put the budget for this in the black and ensures that on day one we have success with the program.

I urge the committee to consider supporting this initiative, which will allow Kansas residents to legally and responsibly keep raccoons as pets while upholding high standards of animal welfare and public safety.

Thank you for your time. I welcome any questions you may have.