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**To: Fair Volunteers**

**From: Mark Ryba, President of the Board of Directors**

**Date: October 23, 2017**

**Re: Exotic animal Bill 23-17**

Today, I am issuing a call for action to all volunteers, the entire membership and all supporters of the Montgomery County Agricultural Fair to address a very important legislative issue that endangers our future.

A few weeks prior to the 2017 Montgomery County Agricultural Fair, I learned about the proposal of Bill 23-17 Animal Control-Performance Animal-Violations. I organized a task force to research the issue and determine if the Bill poses a threat to the structure of our annual Fair. The task force includes members of the Farm Bureau, Ag Advisory Committee, Montgomery Agricultural Producers, the Board of the Montgomery County Agricultural Fair, our Executive Director, and our Fair attorney. The task force has met with County Council members, members of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), and concerned citizens. The task force has also met with many business owners and others who may be affected if this Bill passes. After much deliberation, the task force determined it is best to oppose this Bill and work to prevent passage.

We learned that the HSUS authored the Bill, intending to target our Fair and agricultural shows across the country. It is important to note there are already in place state, local, and federal laws that protect all animals from abuse. Bill 23-17 will classify having exotic animals on display as a form of animal abuse. If this Bill passes, we may no longer be able to host a circus on our grounds during non-Fair season, depriving our organization of valuable income. We might not be able to present exotic educational displays such as the sharks, bears, and camels we've featured in the past. In addition, licensed business owners that showcase exotic animals for educational purposes in Montgomery County will be forced to relocate or close.

We feel strongly that the main proponent of this Bill, HSUS, is pursuing their agenda at the expense of the county Fair and the agricultural community. Because this Bill targets exotic traveling animals, you may wonder why we are so concerned. We fear this Bill will open a door to the display of livestock eventually being classified as abuse. We want to protect the future of livestock shows in our county as they are a much needed source of animal education.

While the text of Bill 23-17 is not yet final, there is considerable support among the County Council members and this proposed Bill could become law. The Council Members sponsoring Bill 23-17 are; Rice and Leventhal, with co-sponsors Katz, Navarro, Riemer, Elrich, Hucker and Council President Berliner.

The Montgomery County Agricultural Fair strongly opposes Bill 23-17 and is urging the County Council to do the same.

We need your help in the following ways and encourage you to:

- Become familiar with Bill 23-17 by visiting [mcagfair.com](http://mcagfair.com)
- Send letters to the County Council members, urging them not to support Bill 23-17. (at [mcagfair.com](http://mcagfair.com) you will find a letter that you can print to mail or e-mail).
- E-mail each individual County Council member and tell them you do not support Bill 23-17 (visit [mcagfair.com](http://mcagfair.com) for detailed facts and contact information)
- Call each County Council member to express opposition to Bill 23-17. (visit [mcagfair.com](http://mcagfair.com) for contact information)

The County Council assigned the drafting of the Bill to the Public Safety Committee, which has scheduled a hearing for the consideration of the animal control Bill concerning exotic animal acts for November 9, 2017, at 11:30 a.m. at 100 Maryland Ave., Rockville, MD. All comments must be submitted to the County Council before Friday, November 3rd. Please act NOW.

Watch our website and social media for updated information.

The continuation of the Montgomery County Agricultural Fair in its current form is very important to all of us. We are very proud of the events and education that we provide to the community. We take exceptional care of all animals on our grounds and support the efforts of the department of Animal Control to prevent animal cruelty.

If you have questions, please call the Fair Office, 301-926-3100.

Thank you for your support and attention to this matter.



Mark Ryba  
President, Board of Directors