

# President's Message

## Llamas are domestic animals—not exotics



One of GALA's new ventures is creating a national llama promotion campaign. This Committee, initiated in January, is actively working on its mission to educate the General Public about the virtues of llamas. (An article on the Committee's plans is in this issue.)

This need to inform the General Public about llamas was dramatically underscored very recently when Massachusetts legislators, in proposed Senate Bill 490 (Wild and Exotic Animal Performance Prohibition), listed llamas as "exotic" animals, not domesticated animals, which would have devastating results for llamas and llama owners in Massachusetts (and probably in neighboring states).

In this bill, "'Wild Animal' and 'Exotic Animal' shall mean any animal that is not a Domestic Animal or Farm Animal, whether wild-borne or captive-bred, and any hybrid of such animals with Domestic Animals or Farm Animals. *These terms shall include, but not be limited to animals such as: artiodactyla (hippopotami, giraffes, camels, llamas...*" (Italics added)

The bill also stipulates: "It shall be unlawful for any Person to Cause a Performance of any Wild Animal or Exotic Animal on any public or private property within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts." This would directly affect the Massachusetts hosted Big E Llama Show.

Performance is defined as: "...any exhibition, public showing, presentation, display, exposition, fair, agricultural fair, act, circus, ride, trade show, petting zoo, carnival, parade, race, performance, or similar undertaking in which animals are required to perform tricks, fight, give rides, or participate as accompaniments for the entertainment, amusement, or benefit of an audience."

GALA members contacted Senator Bruce

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**"In Massachusetts alone, 1,676 registered llamas are an integral part of our community."**

**—Dr. Daniela Bedenice**

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Tarr, the filer of the bill, complaining about the inclusion of llamas as "exotic" animals. Barb Baker, GALA's Government Relations Representative, was on the phone immediately to Massachusetts legislators.

Dr. Stephen Purdy and Dr. Daniela Bedenice, two prominent Massachusetts camelid vets came forward to assist in educating the bill's sponsors by pointing out that llamas are domesticated animals. Both vets are familiar to the GALA Community, having presented at GALA Conferences over the years and cared for our animals.

Dr. Bedenice, Associate Professor, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University, stressed the domestication history of llamas and also pointed out the economic benefit of llamas to Massachusetts. Here is part of her email to Senator Tarr:

"As a veterinarian who has specialized in the field of large animal internal medicine and practiced in Massachusetts for over 20 years, it is essential for me to protect the wellbeing of all animals that have been placed into our care. As such, the llama has become an important domesticated species... More specially, llamas are one of the oldest domesticated species in the world having been used for transporting goods for over 5,000 years in the Andes.

"In Massachusetts alone, 1,676 registered llamas are an integral part of our community. They not only serve essential purposes in the farming industry (guarding

sheep and goat herds from predators), for fiber production (retail) and public service (education, therapy, companionship, show) but their domestication has resulted in tangible economic benefits for the industry of the state.

"The latter include financial benefit to veterinary services, hay farmers and truckers, feed stores, agricultural supply stores, fiber mills, trailer dealers, shearing personnel, lumbar retailers to construct and maintain fencing, among other benefits. As an example, approximately 10-15% of our veterinary patients... consist of llamas and alpacas. I would like to ask you to strongly reconsider classifying llamas (and alpacas) as 'exotic species' under the proposed legislation S490."

As we all know, legislation can have unintended consequences. Apparently Senator Bruce Tarr's intent in filing this legislation was to address traveling performing acts or circuses, which can often have cruel and abusive living circumstances for animals.

Senator Tarr responded to Dr. Bedenice: "The points you and other Commonwealth residents, many of whom own small businesses, raised as unintended consequences of Senate Bill 490 as currently drafted certainly point to the fact that the bill warrants a much more thorough analysis and additional vetting by stakeholders and the general public."

Barb Baker, upon reading Dr. Bedenice's email and the response by Senator Tarr warns, "Even though letters, emails, and calls have been made on this issue, we're not out of the woods yet." I agree with Barb. We need to monitor this proposed bill until this issue is OFFICIALLY resolved and llamas are no longer classified as "exotic" animals.

—Jane Hamilton-Merritt