April 30, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC  20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC  20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC  20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC  20510

RE:  Emergency financial support needed for zoo and aquarium animal care costs

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer:

The nation’s zoos and aquariums urgently need your help. While gates remain closed with no paying visitors, animals still have critical daily needs, including food, veterinary care, enrichment, and habitat maintenance. Zoo and aquarium workers can’t turn out the lights, lock up their buildings, and go home. Instead, they continue to provide high quality care every day to the thousands of aquatic and terrestrial animals that depend on them, and the cost of that care is significant.

Large zoos and aquariums that display thousands of animals must spend an estimated $580,000 to $1,000,000 per month on animal care, NOT INCLUDING staffing or utilities. Medium-sized facilities spend an estimated $70,000 to $150,000 on animal care per month, and small facilities can spend from $15,000 to $54,000 per month, depending on the species and number of animals they display.
Many zoos and aquariums have applied for assistance through CARES Act programs to help meet expenses such as payroll, rent, mortgage and utilities. However, while some of these programs offer expedited financial assistance for certain expenses, the allowed expenses do not include the cost of animal food, medicine, and other critical care needs.

In order to help public display facilities meet this urgent need, the zoological community is seeking $800 million from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to support zoo and aquarium Class C Exhibitors, which are licensed and inspected by USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented significant challenges across society and sectors, including the zoological community, and this assistance is needed from USDA APHIS or from another qualified government entity that has an existing grant program which may be appropriate. We request that funds be made available as expeditiously as possible to cover critical ongoing animal care costs, including food, medicine and medical supplies, diagnostics, environmental testing, life support and other costs related to animal care. Given that many zoos and aquariums, large and small, may be organized as for-profit entities, we ask that funds be provided to all licensed zoological facilities, regardless of their tax status or affiliation, to appropriately support ongoing animal care needs.

Even when stay-at-home orders and travel restrictions are lifted, it will take considerable time for visitation numbers to return to a level that can sustain zoological operations. Because many facilities depend heavily on funds generated in the spring and summer months to help subsidize operations in the slower fall and winter months, the loss of revenue from those seasons this year will make their financial needs even more acute. Other facilities are almost exclusively dependent on tourism, with most of their visitors arriving by cruise line or air travel, which will likely be even slower to resume. In the meantime, zoos and aquariums of all kinds must and will continue to provide the critical, ongoing, and costly care on which their animals depend, but they need your help. Immediate financial support is imperative to help all zoos and aquariums across the country continue to meet the needs of the animals in their care, animals that serve as important and much loved ambassadors for public education, conservation, and research.

Zoos and aquariums not only incur costs associated with providing care to the animals in their permanent collections, many facilities also rescue, rehabilitate and return to the wild animals that are ill, injured or orphaned. While costly, facilities provide this because it is the right and compassionate thing to do, and because doing so is consistent with the conservation mission of the zoological community.

Animals in zoos and aquariums are a critically important part of education and conservation programs and are essential to promoting environmental stewardship. Providing this urgently needed economic support for animal care is the humane thing to do in the short-term and will in the longer-term help zoos and aquariums continue to foster in future generations of Americans an appreciation for the importance of conserving a wide range of species and their habitats.

More than 200 million people visit U.S. zoos and aquariums each year. Accredited facilities generate $22.5 billion in economic activity and support 198,000 jobs. These facilities are often icons in their local communities and have a significant economic impact in their states. Even though their doors are closed to the public, their commitment to the health and well-being of the animals in their care...
remains constant. The nation’s zoos and aquariums urgently need emergency federal support to help them continue to honor their commitment to these amazing animals.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Dezio
President and CEO
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cc: The Honorable Richard Shelby, Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Nita Lowey, Chair, House Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Kay Granger, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee