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Written Testimony on HR669 Nonnative Wildlife Invasion Act
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans & Wildlife

The US Association of Reptile Keepers (USARK) is a science and education based advocacy for the responsible private ownership of, and trade in reptiles. We endorse caging standards, sound husbandry, escape prevention protocols, and an integrated approach to vital conservation issues. Our goal is to facilitate cooperation between government agencies, the scientific community, and the private sector in order to produce policy proposals that will effectively address important husbandry and conservation issues. The health of these animals, public health & safety, and maintaining ecological integrity are our primary concerns. Our membership consists of scientists, breeders, dealers, zoos, hobbyists, equipment manufacturers, dry goods, food producers, educational outreach programs, serpentariums, rescue and rehabilitation organizations and TV & film producers. We represent a 3 billion dollar a year industry.

HR 669 is a fundamentally flawed bill written by powerful special Interest groups with the stated goal of ending the captive husbandry of reptiles and amphibians. Claims to the contrary are difficult to balance with carefully calculated actions to circumvent quantifiable scientific methods. Members and staff have been counseled by proponents of HR 669 that this fact is all myth. However, there is no denying that this bill was designed to end the captive husbandry of many animals that have been held in the US in self sustaining, genetically diverse populations for decades, while cloaking the effort in the guise of saving the taxpayers from a problem that never existed where the vast majority of our animals are concerned.

The risk analysis outlined in Section 3 is prejudicial with a guilty until proven innocent approach to putting animals on an unaccepted list until they can be proven NOT to be under any circumstances a threat to the economy, ecology, agriculture or human or animal species health. The burden is to prove a negative in order to be included on the accepted list. Staff has been misled by the proponents to believe that these are not the facts. However a plain reading of HR669 would indicate that if passed any animal not on the accepted list would be covered by Section 6 of the bill making it a crime to import,

export, purchase, sale, trade, transport across state lines or breed until such time said animal was added to the accepted list. The fact that addition to the accepted list is fee based is ridiculous. This flawed risk analysis and the prohibitions and penalties outlined in Section 6 would destroy the captive bred reptile industry nation wide.

Proponents of HR 669 have also misrepresented the grandfather clause in section 3. Although it would allow someone to keep an animal that was not included on the accepted list after passage of the Bill, that animal could not be exported, sold, given away, traded, transported across state lines or bred pursuant to Section 6. The animal would become devoid of any economic value. You could not even cross state lines to get veterinary care. You could not move to another state or escape across state lines in the case of a natural disaster. This would set up a scenario where many animals would have to be euthanized. Unfortunately some would not euthanize their animals and may release them into the wild out of spite or over refusal to kill their own animals.

This bill is poorly written and overreaching. HR 669 purports to address stopping the import of animals that would have a dangerous impact as an invasive species on the US, but the reality is that most of the Reptiles and Amphibians in the US are captive bred from stock that has been in the US for decades without a problem. It is indicative of the underlying agenda of the proponents.

USARK recognizes that there are some problems with invasive species in different parts of the country. Many of these plants and animals were actually introduced by federal and state government. Some were accidental introductions. Very few were as the result of our activities. It is primarily a state problem that should be dealt with as such. Any solutions should be arrived at objectively and fairly, taking into consideration the impact on American citizens. Science should be the driving force behind any bill of this nature, not the ideology of activists and attorneys working for a powerful special interest. USARK is a conservation organization that is sensitive to environmental issues. We continue to work with science based organizations to find ways to address critical ecological issues.

Please oppose HR 669. It was written by attorneys and has no quantifiable scientific benefits. It would destroy thousands of small businesses and bankrupt American families. We have delivered nearly 50,000 letters opposing this Bill in the last 2 weeks to this subcommittee and have motivated thousands of calls to subcommittee offices in the last 3 days. It is clear that there is significant opposition from tax paying citizens who fear for their future and that of their children.

Sincerely,

Andrew Wyatt
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