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Presented by Representatives *Gutiérrez Colón and Lebrón Robles* and by the
Representative *Márquez Lebrón*

Referred to the Commissions of Natural Resources; and Agriculture

LAW

To establish the "Special Law on the Moratorium on Exotic Animals," impose a five-year moratorium on the importation, introduction, sale, reproduction, and transfer of exotic animals in Puerto Rico; create the Scientific and Animal Welfare Committee on Alien Species, establish limited exceptions, a voluntary surrender program, provide for sanctions; and for other related purposes

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Puerto Rico is facing a state of ecological emergency due to the introduction, trade, reproduction, and release of exotic animals. The effects of this emergency are observed from the forests to the urban areas of the archipelago. This is partly due to the fact that Puerto Rico's geographical reality implies greater vulnerability than in other jurisdictions. Ecosystems are home to species that have evolved in a separate way and that lack defenses against new competing predators and disease transmitters. The entry of an exotic species capable of reproducing and dispersing can alter food chains, displace native species, destroy habitats, affect agriculture, and generate a risk to public health and safety.

Currently, exotic animals arrive in Puerto Rico primarily through commercial imports destined for pet stores, breeders, exhibitors, and private collections, as well as through individual purchases made from breeders and distributors in the United States or abroad, including through websites and social media. These animals can enter by air or sea and are subject to different permits depending on the species, its provenance, and

the proposed use. The Department of Natural and Environmental Resources determines which species can be imported, possessed, reproduced, or sold, while the Department of Agriculture oversees sanitary requirements, veterinary certificates, and entry conditions. When animals come from abroad or belong to protected species, federal agencies may also be involved. Once in Puerto Rico, captive breeding, sales and transfers between individuals, clandestine trade, escapes, and intentional releases facilitate their dispersal. The intervention of multiple agencies, the absence of an integrated tracking system and the difficulties of inspection make it impossible to know precisely how many exotic animals enter, reproduce, sell or change owners in the archipelago.

Human activities have increased the flow of exotic species to Puerto Rico. Biological invasions require research, management, and government coordination. A striking example is the iguana. Its introduction was mainly related to the pet trade. By the 1990s, adult specimens were already detected in the wild. The Department of Natural and Environmental Resources conservatively estimated that by 2012 there were at least four million green iguanas in Puerto Rico.

The green iguana consumes crops, flowers, leaves, and fruits; digs burrows that can weaken roads, sidewalks, levees, and foundations; interferes with airports and other facilities; and can be associated with health risks, such as Salmonella transmission. A female can produce about fifty eggs per nest, and adult specimens in Puerto Rico do not have predators capable of effectively reducing their populations. The case of the iguana demonstrates that allowing the trade and reproduction of a species until its effects are evident is tantamount to intervening too late.

The situation of exotic birds also deserves immediate attention. A scientific investigation on the parrots of Puerto Rico identified forty-six (46) species of parakeets, parakeets and macaws related to the island. Of these, at least nineteen (19) have been observed in the wild. The same research documented populations of blue and yellow macaws in the metropolitan area and in the municipality of Orocovis, including reproductive activity. The establishment of numerous species of exotic birds produces competition for nesting spaces, food and territory.

The emergency also includes exotic snakes. Through Administrative Order No. 2024-05, the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources identified as invasive and detrimental, among others, the boa constrictor, the reticulated python and the royal python. The agency reported that there are reproductive populations of these snakes in the wild and authorized their capture without limit of specimens. These species can prey on birds, mammals and reptiles; they lack sufficient natural controls and some reach dimensions capable of representing a danger to domestic animals, livestock and humans.

The magnitude of the problem is reflected in the capture operations. During a government intervention of just four (4) days, in July 2026, eighty (80) boa constrictors,

four (4) reticulated pythons and three (3) alligators, among other animals, were captured. An operation of such limited duration that produces these results constitutes an alarming indicator of the presence and dispersion of exotic species in the environment.

Alligators are another visible manifestation of this crisis. These reptiles have been found in lakes, rivers, wetlands, ponds, canals, and areas near communities. The Department of Natural and Environmental Resources has captured hundreds of alligators in recent years. As of June 2025, the Department's Species Confinement Center was keeping thirty-five (35) alligators in custody, along with two hundred and seventy-six (276) snakes, while receiving more than twenty (20) snakes weekly. The continued presence of these predators in bodies of water creates risks to wildlife, domestic animals, and people who use such locations for recreational, agricultural, or community purposes.

Puerto Rico is also facing a situation with primate establishment in the southwest region. Several government agencies maintain a project to control populations of patas monkeys and rhesus macaques in several municipalities. The program responds, among other issues, to the damages suffered and claimed by farmers and possible harmful effects of these primates on native wildlife.

Between July and November 2025, the Species Confinement Center located in the Cambalache neighborhood of Arecibo received more than one thousand (1,000) exotic animals, including seven (7) primates, one hundred and forty-four (144) parrots, and more than eight hundred (800) snakes. These worrying data reveal the seriousness of the consequences of trafficking and irresponsible ownership for this crisis.

This situation constitutes an enormous ecological risk for Puerto Rico. The protection of biodiversity, agriculture, animal welfare and the safety of communities require action to prevent irreversible damage.

This legislation recognizes that exotic and wild animals are sentient beings, capable of experiencing pain, fear, stress, and well-being. Consequently, the State's response to the problem of exotic species should not be based on hostility towards animals, but on human responsibility derived from their capture, reproduction, trade, and introduction outside their natural ecosystems. This Law seeks to simultaneously protect Puerto Rico's biodiversity and the wild animals themselves, preventing them from continuing to be victims of trafficking, commercial exploitation, and loss of their freedom. The protection of ecosystems and animal welfare are complementary objectives that should guide the State's public policy.

For all of the above, this Legislative Assembly establishes a moratorium of five (5) years on the importation, sale, reproduction, transfer and transfer of exotic animals, subject only to strictly delimited exceptions for scientific, conservation, veterinary, accredited educational or public security purposes. This period will be used to provide

the State with the necessary time to develop a comprehensive system for the management of exotic species based on scientific, environmental, sanitary and ethical criteria.

THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF PUERTO RICO HEREBY DECREES:

Article1.-Title.

This Law will be known as the "Special Moratorium Law for Exotic Animals".

Article2.- Public Policy.

It is the public policy of the Government of Puerto Rico to prevent new imports, escapes, abandonment, and reproduction of exotic animals; to protect native biodiversity, agriculture, public health, and the safety of communities; to recognize animals as sentient beings whose well-being constitutes a legitimate interest of the State; to prevent the trafficking, exploitation, and irresponsible trade of wild animals; to promote their remaining, whenever possible, in their natural ecosystems; and to adopt decisions on exotic species in accordance with the principle of prevention, the precautionary principle, the best available scientific evidence, and respect for animal welfare.

Article 3.- Definitions.

For the purposes of this Law, the words or phrases listed below have the meanings indicated herein:

1. Exotic Animal: those species that are not part of the native or migratory flora or fauna of Puerto Rico.
2. Committee: Scientific and Animal Welfare Committee on Alien Species.
3. DNER: Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.

1 4. Import or Introduce: Disembark, enter, introduce to or attempt to disembark,
2 enter or introduce flora and fauna to any place within the jurisdiction of Puerto
3 Rico.

4 5. Reproduction: The breeding or production of new specimens of an animal
5 species, including reproduction in captivity and the incubation or hatching of
6 its eggs, in accordance with the activities of reproduction, rearing and
7 management of recognized eggs, neonates and offspring.

8 6. Transfer: Selling, donating, assigning, exchanging, delivering, or otherwise
9 transferring to another person the possession, custody, or control of an exotic
10 animal, with or without remuneration.

11 Article 4.- Moratorium.

12 A moratorium is declared during which no natural or legal person may, directly
13 or indirectly, import, introduce, buy, sell, offer for sale, reproduce, exchange or transfer
14 exotic animals in Puerto Rico, except as expressly authorized by this Act.

15 During this moratorium, only those provisions of Act No. 241-1999, as amended,
16 known as the "New Wildlife Law of Puerto Rico" and Regulation No. 6765, entitled
17 "Regulations to Govern the Conservation and Management of Wildlife, Alien Species and
18 Hunting in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico" in all matters related to the granting of
19 licenses and permits related to importing, introducing, buying, selling, offering for sale,
20 breeding, exchanging or transferring exotic animals in Puerto Rico; as well as any other
21 law or regulation that is affected by this moratorium, will also be null and void. During

1 the moratorium, the DNER and the Department of Agriculture will not issue permits that
2 are incompatible with this Act.

3 Nothing in the Left shall prevent the authorized export of exotic animals out of
4 Puerto Rico, provided that the laws of the destination, federal requirements, and animal
5 welfare and safe transportation conditions are complied with.

6 Article 5.- Pre-existing Possession and Transitory Registration of Exotic Animals.

7 The Transitory Registry of Exotic Animals is created in the Department of Natural
8 and Environmental Resources. The purpose of the Registry shall be to identify exotic
9 animals that were lawfully present in Puerto Rico prior to the entry into force of this Act,
10 to know their location, and to maintain information necessary for their inspection and
11 management.

12 Any natural or legal person who, prior to the entry into force of this Law, lawfully
13 possessed an exotic animal may keep it during the natural life of the animal, provided
14 that it is registered in the Registry within one hundred and eighty (180) days following
15 the date on which the DNER makes the registration mechanism available. The
16 Department shall establish such mechanism within ninety (90) days following the entry
17 into force of this Law.

18 The application for registration must include, at least:

- 19 1. The name and contact information of the holder;
20 2. the address or place where the animal will be kept;
21 3. the common and scientific name of the species, when it can be determined;
22 4. the sex, approximate age and physical characteristics of the animal;

1 5. recent photographs of the animal;

2 6. reasonable evidence that their possession began before the effective date of this
3 Act and was lawful at the time of acquisition; y

4 7. the number or description of the identification mechanism used, where
5 applicable.

6 Reasonable evidence of prior possession shall include, but is not limited to,
7 purchase receipts, permits, veterinary certificates, medical records, dated photographs,
8 transportation documents, or an affidavit accompanied by information corroborating
9 possession. The DNER may require additional information strictly necessary to verify
10 compliance with this Article.

11 Once the information has been verified, the DNER will issue a registration
12 certificate that will identify the animal and its owner. The registration will be individual
13 for each animal, will not be transferable and must be kept available for inspection by
14 authorized officials.

15 Registration in the Register shall not have the effect of:

16 1. validate possession that was illegal before the entry into force of this Law;

17 2. authorise the reproduction, sale, transfer, exchange or transfer of the animal;

18 3. constitute a permit to acquire or import other animals; or

19 4. Relieve the holder of compliance with the conditions of safety, animal welfare,
20 public health and environmental protection established by law or regulation.

21 The registered person must notify the DNER, within five (5) days of becoming
22 aware of the death, loss, escape, or permanent change in the animal's location. In the

1 event of an escape, the registrant must take reasonable measures to facilitate its recapture
2 and comply with any applicable emergency protocol.

3 When the keeper cannot continue to guard the animal, he must notify the DNER.
4 The animal may only be delivered to the Department, to an entity authorized to receive
5 it or to another person expressly authorized by the Secretary. No transfer may be made
6 by sale or generate economic benefit for the keeper.

7 The DNER will keep the personal information and specific location of the animals
8 under the necessary confidentiality measures to protect the safety of people and prevent
9 the theft, trafficking or release of the specimens. However, it will periodically publish
10 aggregated statistical data on the species registered, their quantity and their general
11 distribution by municipality.

12 Once the registration period has elapsed, the possession of an unregistered exotic
13 animal shall be presumed to be contrary to this Law, unless the person demonstrates just
14 cause for the late registration and proves that the possession was lawful and prior to its
15 entry into force. The Secretary shall establish by means of a regulation or administrative
16 order the procedure for evaluating these applications.

17 Article 6.- Exceptions.

18 The Secretary of the DNER may authorize, by means of a specific permit, revocable
19 and subject to strict conditions, only those activities essential for the control, capture,
20 export or humanitarian disposition of exotic populations; non-commercial scientific
21 research by an accredited public agency or academic institution, when there is no
22 reasonable alternative and the protocol has been approved by the corresponding

1 institutional committee; or veterinary care, quarantine, confiscation, temporary shelter or
2 custody by a government entity or an authorized rescue, sanctuary or rehabilitation
3 organization.

4 Article 7.- Scientific and Animal Welfare Committee on Alien Species.

5 The Scientific and Animal Welfare Committee on Alien Species is created, attached
6 to the DNER regardless of criteria. It will be made up of eleven (11) members:

- 7 1. The Secretary of the DNER or a representative of the DNER with decision-
8 making authority, who shall preside over it;
- 9 2. the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture or a representative of the
10 Department of Agriculture with decision-making authority;
- 11 3. the Secretary of Health or a representative of the Secretary of Health with
12 decision-making authority;
- 13 4. two biologists or ecologists with expertise in native fauna and conservation
14 appointed by the University of Puerto Rico;
- 15 5. a veterinarian licensed in Puerto Rico with experience in exotic animals;
- 16 6. two representatives of non-profit organizations for the protection, rescue or
17 defense of animals, with at least three (3) years of demonstrated work in
18 Puerto Rico, seeking geographic diversity and experience; y
- 19 7. a representative of an environmental or biodiversity conservation
20 organization with demonstrated work in Puerto Rico.

21 The members mentioned in paragraphs five (5) to seven (7) shall be appointed by
22 the Governor, with the advice and consent of the Senate, from lists of at least three (3)

1 candidates submitted by institutions or organizations in the corresponding sector. No
2 person with a substantial financial interest in the importation, breeding, or sale of exotic
3 animals may serve on the committee. Its terms shall be five (5) years.

4 Article 8.- Functions of the Committee.

5 The committee will have the following functions:

- 6 1. advise the DNER on exceptional permits, risk criteria, animal welfare and
7 inspection priorities;
- 8 2. prepare a study of exotic animals imported, marketed, delivered and detected
9 in the wild;
- 10 3. to carry out a scientific evaluation of the exotic species present in Puerto Rico,
11 identifying those of greatest ecological, health and animal welfare risk, and
12 developing a classification based on scientific evidence;
- 13 4. to conduct a review of the legal and regulatory framework related to the
14 import, possession, reproduction, transport and trade of exotic animals, as
15 well as to evaluate amendments to internal regulations related to exotic
16 animals;
- 17 5. work on the development of biosafety protocols, including requirements for
18 importation, handling, transportation, identification, quarantine, escape
19 response, and contingency plans to prevent further biological invasions;
- 20 6. establish rigorous criteria for the granting of permits, considering the level of
21 risk of each species, the technical capacity of the custodian, the animal welfare
22 conditions and the required safety measures;

- 1 7. to develop a National Strategy for the Management of Exotic and Invasive
- 2 Species, with the participation of universities, environmental organizations,
- 3 animal welfare entities, government agencies and scientific experts;
- 4 8. periodically evaluate the level of environmental protection and animal
- 5 welfare achieved by this Law and recommend only those regulatory
- 6 modifications that strengthen biosecurity, biodiversity conservation and
- 7 animal welfare, in accordance with the principle of environmental non-
- 8 regression;
- 9 9. publish annual reports; y
- 10 10. submit, no later than six (6) months prior to the expiration of the moratorium,
- 11 a final report to the Governor and the Legislative Assembly with
- 12 recommendations for legislation and regulation. Such report shall assess the
- 13 impact of the moratorium on biodiversity, public health, agriculture, and
- 14 animal welfare, and include recommendations aimed at strengthening the
- 15 protection of wild animals and preventing their capture, reproduction, and
- 16 trade when such activities pose ecological risks or compromise their welfare.

17 Article 9.- Term.

18 The moratorium declared in Article 4 of this Law shall remain in force for a term
19 of not less than five (5) years. It may be renewed after the expiration of said term. If the
20 Committee determines that said period was not sufficient to alleviate the emergency, the
21 term may be extended for a further five (5) years.

22 Article 10.- Voluntary Surrender and Amnesty Program.

1 The DNER will establish, in coordination with the Department of Health, the
2 Department of Agriculture, municipalities, veterinarians and qualified rescue
3 organizations, a Voluntary Surrender Program during the moratorium.

4 A person who voluntarily surrenders an animal will not be penalized for mere
5 possession, unless there is evidence of mistreatment, trafficking or intentional release.

6 The DNER will prioritize, according to the species and individual evaluation,
7 transfer to an authorized facility, adoption by a permitted entity outside of Puerto Rico,
8 sanctuary, export, conservation, or, only as a last resort recommended by a veterinarian
9 and in accordance with humane methods, euthanasia. The lack of government space will
10 not be a reason for the release or automatic death of the animal.

11 Article 11.- Commercial Inventory.

12 Within ninety (90) days from the entry into force of this Law, any importer,
13 breeder, distributor, store, exhibitor or merchant shall submit to the DNER an inventory
14 of their exotic animals, eggs and embryos. Their reproduction and the acquisition of new
15 specimens shall be immediately prohibited. Within a period of no more than one hundred
16 and eighty (180) days, they must be legally exported, transferred, with the authorization
17 of the DNER, to an excepted entity; they must be delivered to the Voluntary Surrender
18 Program or they must request authorization for non-commercial custody for the natural
19 life of the specimens.

20 Article 12.- Interagency Supervision and Coordination.

21 The DNER will establish agreements with the Department of Agriculture, the
22 Department of Health, the Port Authority, the Puerto Rico Police, municipalities and

1 federal agencies to share information, train inspectors, conduct risk-based inspections
2 and intercept face-to-face and online commerce.

3 Article 13.- Sanctions.

4 The DNER will impose a fine of not less than five hundred dollars (\$500.00) nor
5 more than five thousand dollars (\$5,000.00) for each specimen in a first offense; a fine of
6 not less than five thousand dollars (\$5,000.00) to not more than ten thousand dollars
7 (\$10,000.00) per specimen in recidivism or when there is sale, reproduction or profit; and
8 up to twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) for intentionally releasing an exotic animal.
9 Each specimen and each day of non-compliance may constitute a separate infraction.

10 When setting the amount, the damage or risk, number of animals, profit,
11 recidivism, cooperation, economic capacity, animal welfare and corrective efforts will be
12 considered.

13 Article 14.- Allocation of Funds.

14 The Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, the Department of
15 Health, and the Department of Agriculture shall include in the next and subsequent
16 budget requests the funds necessary for compliance with this Act.

17 Article 15.- Regulations.

18 The Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, the Department of
19 Health, and the Department of Agriculture are hereby empowered to adopt the necessary
20 regulations for the purpose of complying with the provisions contained in this Act within
21 a period not exceeding one hundred and eighty (180) days from the adoption of this Act.

22 Article 15.- Supremacy.

1 The provisions of this Law shall prevail over any other provision of law, regulation
2 or rule that is not in harmony with them.

3 Article 16.- Separability.

4 If any of the provisions of this Law are declared unconstitutional, the remaining
5 provisions shall remain in force.

6 Article 17.- Validity.

7 This Law shall enter into force immediately upon its approval.