



Loudoun County, Virginia

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NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release
January 6, 2023

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Public Comments Sought on Proposed Addition to Chapter 612 of Loudoun County Ordinances

Loudoun County is seeking public comment on a proposed new section of Chapter 612 of the Codified Ordinances of Loudoun County that, if adopted, would prohibit private ownership of certain exotic and venomous species of animals that present a risk to public health and safety.

Online Comment Form

Members of the public may provide feedback on the proposed new section of the county's ordinances. More information, including video of the presentation given during a virtual public information meeting hosted by Loudoun County Animal Services (LCAS) on January 5, 2023, and a link to the online comment form, is posted at loudoun.gov/Chapter612addition.

Next Steps

The Board of Supervisors is scheduled to review the proposed ordinance text during its January 17, 2023, business meeting.

The meeting is scheduled to begin at 4:00 p.m. in the Board Room of the Government Center, which is located at 1 Harrison St. SE in Leesburg. Meeting documents will be posted online at least three days before the meeting at loudoun.gov/meetings. Members of the public may attend in person or watch the meeting online or on the county's cable TV channel (Comcast Government Channel 23 or Verizon FiOS 40).

If a majority of Board members vote to move forward with the proposed ordinance revisions following the January 17 review, the amendments would again be considered at a future public hearing prior to a final vote to adopt them.

Background

The revised ordinance as drafted would prohibit private ownership of certain types of exotic and venomous animals, such as wolf hybrids, kangaroos, scorpions, baboons, venomous snakes and other venomous reptiles, and non-native venomous spiders. Loudoun County currently does not prohibit the ownership of these animals by ordinance; however, similar ordinances already exist in the Town of Leesburg; Arlington, Fairfax and Prince William counties; the District of Columbia; and jurisdictions in Maryland.

The proposed ordinance also prohibits the breeding of such animals. Virginia law already restricts private ownership of many other wild and exotic animals, such as big cats and bears. The proposed ordinance would not impact entities that are licensed or permitted through the Virginia

Department of Wildlife Resources or other state or federal agencies to house restricted species, such as zoos, exhibitors or rehabilitators.

The proposed addition would also allow current owners of the listed animals to keep them but would require those animals be registered through a process the county would establish to ensure awareness by first responders in the event of an emergency. Currently, a violation of Chapter 612 is a class 4 misdemeanor, which is punishable by a fine of up to \$250.

In November 2022, the Board of Supervisors' Animal Advisory Committee voted unanimously to support the staff proposal for a new section of the ordinance, which is being proposed by LCAS, whose humane law enforcement officers have encountered venomous animals when responding to routine calls for service. LCAS identified a public safety concern after learning anti-venom for non-native snakes is not readily available in Loudoun County. Informing the proposed ordinance is LCAS officers' collective experience investigating complaints involving wolf-hybrids, scorpions, monkeys and venomous snake species, which indicates that exotic and venomous species are present in Loudoun County residential settings.

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