



**HEMKER PARK & ZOO**  
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March 3, 2025

Representative Paul Anderson  
593 State Office Building  
House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee  
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard  
St. Paul, MN 55155  
RE: HF 434

Dear Chair Anderson and Committee Members,

I am Joan Hemker, the founder and owner of Hemker Park & Zoo, and I am here today in support of Minnesota House File 434, an amendment to the Farmed Cervidae MN 35.155.

At Hemker Park and Zoo, our mission is to promote animal species and advocate for environmental conservation through partnerships and wildlife management. We have cared for reindeer for over 35 years and seek an exemption to continue safeguarding these animals through genetic diversity and community education. As one of only three zoological facilities in Minnesota with reindeer, it is crucial for us to maintain our herd and bring in new reindeer from accredited zoos for responsible population management.

Reindeer are exceptional creatures, not just because they are Santa's preferred animals, but also due to their remarkable characteristics that help them thrive in their environment. Some of these traits include:

- Reindeer have a unique two-layer coat to insulate them from the harsh winter conditions.
- Unlike most deer species, reindeer calves are born without spots.
- Both male and female reindeer grow antlers, setting them apart from other deer species.

Hemker Park & Zoo houses over 48 animals from 26 different AZA institutions, right here in Minnesota. For every animal we house at our facility for an AZA institution, we go through an extremely rigorous inspection with them on-site inspecting our husbandry policies, the exhibits,

daily care, vet care program, animal standards, with an emphasis that focuses on staff, animal, and public's safety. We have met and exceeded over 26 AZA institution inspections. In addition, one of the co-owners of Hemker Park & Zoo is a member of AZA.

We are also involved in numerous breeding programs to maximize genetic diversity, ensuring the preservation of these animals for future generations.

Affording AZA-accredited institutions, and not a United States Department of Agriculture-licensed exhibitor of regulated animals; that houses animal owned by institutions accredited by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association; and participates in the American Zoo and Aquarium Association Species Survival Plan is truly unjust.

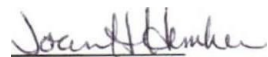
While excluding the above entities who follow those requirements, is also problematic from a legal perspective. The Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution requires state governmental bodies to treat an individual in the same manner as others in similar conditions and circumstances. Singling out USDA-licensed zoos, that houses animals owned by AZA facilities and work with the species survival plan for more restrictive treatment could violate those zoos' right to equal protection under the law, and from an animal welfare and public safety perspective, has no rational basis. As the current exemption allows zoological facilities to import cervids into the state.

As a women-owned business based in Minnesota, our goal is to advocate for equality, similar to the acknowledgment an AZA entity would receive. Our plea is not to bring in white-tailed deer into Minnesota, but to continue our work with reindeer and genetic diversity.

Hemker Park & Zoo fully supports and urges the amendment HF 434 to MN Statue 35.155.

I am available at any time with any questions regarding this and I thank the authors of HF 434.

Sincerely,



Joan Hemker

Founder/Owner

HemkerPark & Zoo

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