



April 22, 2025

Mr. Chair and Members of the Ways & Means Committee,

Thank you for including the Minnesota Zoo in the Environment and Natural Resources Finance Omnibus Bill (HF2439). We recognize the challenges of this session and sincerely appreciate your hard work on behalf of all Minnesotans. The Minnesota Zoo has taken significant strides in reducing our budget for FY25 and FY26.

We understand that this is a Lights-On bill and that your work will continue. However, even if the Governor's recommended \$1.038 million increase is ultimately included, we would have to eliminate 12 positions—a significant portion coming from layoffs. If the Governor's recommended appropriation is not included in the final bill, an additional round of staff layoffs will be necessary. Even after these staffing reductions, a significant structural deficit would remain, requiring further action in future years.

The legislature established the Minnesota Zoo in statute as a unique state agency. As a small agency with a dual public-private funding model, we rely on the state for only 37% of our operating budget and are responsible for generating the rest through our own efforts. This means we have little ability to absorb cuts without reducing staff or scaling back critical revenue-generating operations. When we are forced to cut budgets, our capacity to earn revenue decreases—ultimately increasing the need for state support down the line.

At this pivotal time, Zoo Board Chair Grace Chou and I respectfully urge your continued support. As stewards of the Minnesota Zoo, we are committed to proactively addressing operational challenges—protecting guest and animal safety, preserving our institutional reputation, and preventing the need for emergency funding in the future.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to keeping the Minnesota Zoo a vibrant and valued resource for our state.

Respectfully,

John Frawley
Director, Minnesota Zoo

Grace Chou
Chair, Zoo Board