

Testimony on HB 2297
House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks
February 17, 2025

Chairman Rahjes and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide neutral testimony on House Bill 2297. This bill would make legal the ownership, veterinary care, and rabies immunization of raccoons for the purpose of keeping such animals as pets and would remove or limit the authority of the Secretary of the Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) to prohibit the keeping of wild raccoons as pets, as regulated by K.A.R. 115-5-2 that only allows live furbearers, legally taken during a furbearer season, to be possessed only through the last day of the season in which taken. Additionally, K.A.R. 28-1-14 prohibits the possession of raccoons due to their involvement in the transmission of rabies.

Rabies virus strains are a nearly 100% fatal disease in mammals, including humans. The rabies virus is responsible for an estimated 70,000 deaths on a worldwide scale. Officials in states east of the Mississippi River have and continue to proactively spread vaccinated baits to prevent the spread of raccoon rabies to western states such as Kansas, which is currently free of the raccoon rabies strain. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), these preventative measures cost \$500M annually and are estimated to prevent \$1B in medical costs associated with raccoon rabies exposure.

Raccoons carry other zoonotic diseases harmful to humans, including the parasitic *Baylisascaris procyonis*, commonly known as the raccoon roundworm. While the raccoon is the definitive host and commensally lives with the parasite without any problems, once inside another mammal the parasite becomes “lost” and migrates through the host body, causing ocular damage, fatal neurologic conditions, and/or lifelong complications. While treatments are available that might reduce serious disease, no treatments to date are totally effective at killing the parasite after it has infected a human.

Raccoon roundworm prevalence in raccoon populations in midwestern states is thought to be as high as 80% (Gehrt and Page, Ohio State University Extension, Fact Sheet W-20-08, 2008). A 2011 Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study documented found this parasite in neurologic fox squirrels in Douglas County, KS.

Furthermore, when it is determined that an animal needs to be rehomed, it falls on KDWP to be the enforcement agency. Consequently, this will incur the unknown costs associated with the game wardens tasked with finding appropriate homes for a species with a year-round hunting

season. Unfortunately, animals that are habituated and in season are more likely to be euthanized.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on House Bill 2297. I am happy to provide additional information at the appropriate time.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christopher Kennedy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Christopher" and the last name "Kennedy" clearly legible.

Christopher Kennedy
Acting Secretary
Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks