

## **HOUSE BILL**

SB 342 - 2024

Committee on Federal and State Affairs AN ACT concerning motor vehicles; relating to license plates; providing for the Sedgwick county zoo distinctive license plate.

Hearing: Wednesday, January 31, 2024, 8:30 AM Room 546-S (1/24)

Speaker: Scott Newland, President & Chief Executive Officer, Sedgwick County Zoo, Wichita, KS

## **WRITTEN TESTIMONY:**

Good morning.

My name is Scott Newland, and I am the President and Chief Executive Officer for the Sedgwick County Zoo. Thank you for this opportunity to present some brief information about the Zoo and our proposal to you to offer a Zoo license plate to our community and friends across Kansas. As you will learn this morning, community pride in our Zoo is at an all-time high.

Just a quick history, in 1963, the Sedgwick County Zoological Society, Inc., a not-for-profit charitable, educational and scientific organization, was chartered by a group of community leaders to foster public interest and support in and for a new zoo. The Sedgwick County Zoo opened August 25, 1971 with the American and Asian Farms as the first exhibits. The Zoo has seen steady progress through the past five decades with major exhibits opening every few years.

What started with 2 domestic farm habitats on 212 acres of undeveloped land, is now one of the country's top Zoos and the number one outdoor tourist attraction in the great state of Kansas, home to more than 3,000 animals of nearly 400 different species with our mission of inspiring respect and conservation of wildlife and wild place.

The Sedgwick County Zoo has a very unique corporate structure in that the Zoo is a partnership between Sedgwick County and the Zoological Society Board of Directors. The Directors govern the Zoo with a negotiable contract from Sedgwick County. This model has been looked upon as very successful and sought after by many zoos across the country as a very efficient way to govern. Because of this model the Zoo is able to raise funds from the community for operating and capital improvements alike.

Recent consumer and economic research in 2023 paints a robust picture the Zoo holds in our community.

- Overall favorability of the Zoo has remained at a high 97 percent
- Annual attendance averages 600,000 guests
- Nearly half of our visitors travel from out of the county to visit
- More than 17,000 households in Sedgwick County hold memberships to the Zoo
- Annual economic impact to our community is \$59.4 million
- We have been recognized with national and international awards for support of field conservation programs and successful breeding of rare and endangered species.

The Sedgwick County Zoological Society Board, is comprised of nearly 30 corporate, governmental and private citizens in the Wichita community. Representatives from major industry are vital to our board composition including Textron Aviation, Spirit Aerosystems, Koch Industries, Evergy, and many others.

In addition to opening many new exhibits over the years, providing quality care to the animals, and participating in and contributing to conservation and research initiatives, the Zoo provides many valuable experiences to our guests.

- We provide daily interactions to the public including attending keeper chats, observing animal training sessions, and unique animal experiences.
- The Zoo strives to develop and execute a variety of special event programming to attract visitors from all parts of our community and the region.
- The Zoo focuses on reaching students of Title 1 schools through general visitation opportunities and educational programming. The diversity of programming through our education classes is designed to reach all ages and socio-economic groups. A variety of in-house programs are offered as well as Zoo Reach programs for those who can't make it to the Zoo, such as senior centers.
- The Zoo also takes several veterinary interns each year as well as offers student practicum and internship opportunities and the ability to work with various departments in the Zoo through our extensive volunteer program.

With me here this morning is a long-time employee, volunteer and friend of the Zoo, Barb Hoppins. It was Barb who originally came to us with this idea to pursue the plate. In fact, Barb provided the underwriting support to accomplish the behind the scenes work involved. I want to publicly recognize Barb for her support and creativity with this project and other activities at the Zoo.

With your approval, we will be able to reach thousands of people to inform them of this new opportunity and how selecting a personalized Zoo license plate will assist their Zoo with support for operations and conservation efforts alike.

Thank you for your consideration and support. And we welcome you all to visit the Sedgwick County Zoo next time you are in the Wichita area.