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December 3, 2024

Commissioner on Animal Control and Welfare Michael Angelo Torres  
Honorable Aaron Peskin  
City Attorney David Chiu

We are the Board of Directors of the San Francisco Zoological Society. A recent prepared report by the Commission on Animal Control and Welfare has resulted in irreparable harm to the reputation of the San Francisco Zoo & Gardens, and we request it be withdrawn.

**Background of the Commission's Report**

A recent report by a minority of the Commission on Animal Control and Welfare is very concerning—not just because of its biased-based conclusions but because of its glaring lack of rigor, expertise, and factual basis. This unprofessionally prepared report (signed by only 2 of the 7 Commissioners), was derived from a brief two-hour walk-through of the San Francisco Zoo with no fact-finding discussions with SF Zoo’s animal care experts or senior leadership. It contradicts the findings for many decades of established professional organizations. These organizations have consistently affirmed that the Zoo’s animals are well cared for in habitats that meet or exceed established safety and welfare standards.

The methodology and political motives behind this report are highly questionable. Unlike the extensive, months-long reviews conducted by accredited external professionals such as the AZA and the USDA, this report was spearheaded by individuals with no recognized expertise in animal care. One co-author is a self-described event consultant and the other a writer. An addendum attached was authored by a known anti-zoo activist, who is not even a member of the Commission. This individual describes himself on LinkedIn as in Film Production and has apparently self-published a book. Their arbitrary evaluation criteria deviate entirely from the standards used by respected zoo accrediting bodies. Notably, the only commission

member with professional animal care experience, Brian Van Horn, DVM, neither participated in the zoo walk-through nor signed the report.

### **Defamatory Nature of Report**

To compound the issue, the report was prematurely leaked to the press before San Francisco Zoo representatives could review and address its inaccuracies. This deliberate move undermines the report's transparency and damages the credibility of the process.

A baseless report like this and with unwarranted demands for an exhaustive audit of the zoo divert critical resources from the City and jeopardize SF Zoo's fundraising efforts. Unfortunately, this false and misleading report has been repeated in the press and on the anti-zoo activist's website and its defamatory nature has eroded public trust and impacted visitor attendance and engagement. This entire exercise has done nothing but put SF Zoo's future at risk and jeopardizes the ability of SF Zoo to get the necessary approvals to host the Giant Pandas; significantly impacting future revenues for the Zoo and the City, our community pride and San Francisco's already-damaged reputation when it has to be announced that we are no longer approved for the pandas.

It's hard to imagine a city as prestigious as San Francisco will accept that its government representatives - with no professional animal expertise - acted in ways that could likely eradicate one of its beloved family and tourist destinations. At a time when San Francisco is working to recover from the challenges of COVID-19 and revitalize its economy, we should be supporting institutions like the San Francisco Zoo, which has been a pillar of our community for nearly 100 years.

Instead of undermining SF Zoo, we should focus on increasing funding, improving infrastructure, and promoting it as a vibrant destination for residents and tourists alike. The San Francisco Zoo is not just an attraction—it is a vital part of our cultural heritage, an educational resource, and an economic driver for the City.

### **Request to Withdraw Report**

We urge you to consider retracting this defamatory report particularly given it has resulted in further defamatory press and quotes on the anti-zoo activist's website.

We thank you for your attention and commitment to doing what is best for our City.

Sincerely,

SFZS Board of Directors