



MICHIGAN AUDUBON

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POSITION STATEMENT ON HB 4596 IN MICHIGAN

June 13, 2019

Michigan Audubon **opposes** House Bill 4596, which aims to promote “community cat programs” and to make community cats and their caretakers (certain individuals and organizations) exempt from certain statutes and local ordinances regarding the management of free-roaming cats in Michigan.

Michigan Audubon supports effective and humane measures of reducing the number of free-roaming cats (thus helping native bird populations), with which this proposed legislation does not align.

Feasibility

The ongoing and global free-ranging cat debate is incredibly controversial and has been for decades. **The complicated nature of the trap, neuter, release (TNR) protocol that is a part of this bill results in very low efficacy.** It takes a tremendous amount of resources, diligence, consistency, and agreement between stakeholders in the community for TNR to be effective (Roberson 2008); therefore, this method often fails and is impractical.

Conservation Clash

Public knowledge about the loss of native biodiversity worldwide is increasing, as is the acknowledgment that free-roaming cats are unfortunately one of the leading causes of this devastation. In response, **many of the major conservation organizations have taken a stance against re-releasing outdoor cats back into their original environments**, including the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, The Wildlife Society, and the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association. Considering this overwhelming consensus among the conservation and public health communities, it is in the best interests of the constituents of Michigan — who greatly benefit from Michigan’s natural places and biodiversity — that legislators vote no on this bill.

Public Health

Zoonotic diseases are those that are transmitted between humans and animals, and **promoting this bill ignores serious zoonotic disease risks associated with humans caring for large populations of community cats.** The rabies protocol in this bill does not provide sufficient protection against the virus, according to the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians (NASPHV), American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), and National Animal Care and Control Association (NACA).

In addition, another well-known disease associated with cats is toxoplasmosis. Because the pathogen, *Toxoplasma gondii*, can be so easily transmitted to humans from cats, supporters of HB 4596 should redirect their attention to other ways of humanely reducing community cat populations (e.g., increasing public awareness and getting cats indoors).

Shifting the Focus — *Birds need help, not cats*

The domestic cat is so genetically similar to their wild counterparts that it is no surprise they are very successful at surviving outdoors without the help of humans. Consequently, free-roaming domestic cats have contributed to the death of billions of birds annually in the U.S. alone (Loss et al. 2013; Loyd et al. 2013), while many of our native species are declining in number. Yet, this bill aims at supporting this already incredibly successful feline species, when **the more practical and pressing goals should be to humanely reduce free-roaming cat numbers by transitioning them indoors, as well as to promote native bird conservation.**

As the state's oldest conservation organization, we are doing our part and fulfilling our mission of connecting birds and people for the benefit of both by providing relevant education materials aimed at communicating this serious and complicated issue to the public, and we support the like-minded efforts of other organizations. **Michigan Audubon supports programs that focus on keeping cats indoors while allowing them to experience nature in a way that is safe for not only them, but for birds and humans as well.**

References

- Robertson, S. A. 2008. A review of feral cat control. *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* 10(4): 366–375.
- Loss, S. R., T. Will, and P. P. Marra. 2013. The impact of free-ranging domestic cats on wildlife of the United States. *Nature Communications* 4: 1396.
- Loyd, K. A. T., S. M. Hernandez, J. P. Carroll, K. J. Abernathy, and G. J. Marshall. 2013. Quantifying free-roaming domestic cat predation using animal-borne video cameras. *Biological Conservation* 160: 183–189.