



Formerly called the Humane
Society of the United States

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Testimony in Support of SB 535
Presented to the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
February 27, 2025
By Kathleen Conlee, Vice President, Animal Research Issues
Humane World for Animals

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to submit this written testimony on behalf of Humane World for Animals, formerly called the Humane Society of the United States, and our Maryland members and supporters urging a favorable report of SB 535. This important legislation creates a licensing and inspection program for private animal research facilities in the state of Maryland.

In the United States, the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA) requires research facilities to annually report the number of animals used in research and testing and receive inspections from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). However, there are many limitations to this federal oversight. Unfortunately, the AWA only covers warm-blooded animals but specifically excludes birds, rats and mice bred for use in research as well as commonly used cold-blooded species such as fish, which represent the vast majority of animals used in research and testing (up to 99%), meaning that research facilities that only use these non-covered species are not required to register with USDA or receive inspections.

SB 535 creates a new position, the State Inspector of Animal Welfare, within the Maryland Department of Agriculture. The State Inspector must inspect each private facility before receiving a license and inspect once per year each private facility with a current license or once every two years for USDA-licensed facilities. It also requires private facilities to report any violations of the AWA and corresponding regulations within 30 days, triggering an additional inspection within 30 days after notification. SB 535 allows the department to enter into an agreement with an animal control facility to conduct inspections. Schools or institutions of higher education, which are exempt from the Maryland licensing and inspections required under this legislation, must annually report the outcomes of their federally required inspections to the General Assembly.

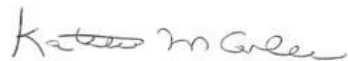
The inspections established by SB 535 will provide much-needed additional oversight of animal welfare at private research facilities, which were cited more than 20 times in the last five years for likely violations of the AWA. Examples of non-compliant items identified during USDA inspections include improper handling of rabbits that resulted in them being injured and

consequently euthanized,¹ unsanitary conditions in rooms where animals are housed including the presence of bugs and damaged drywall,² and deviations from and incomplete animal protocols.³ Two private research facilities in Maryland have even received official warnings from USDA for their alleged violations of the AWA.^{4,5}

Unfortunately, annual inspections conducted by USDA are not sufficient to ensure that animals are being treated according to the minimum standards set by the AWA. Research facilities that are accredited by a third-party organization, such as the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International (AAALAC), are not inspected by the USDA as thoroughly as facilities that are not accredited. Without thorough, consistent inspections, violations could be missed. Additionally, enforcement of documented suspected AWA violations by research facilities is not carried out by the USDA as often as it should be. The state-level inspections required by the provisions in this bill would provide more opportunities for animal welfare concerns to be documented and addressed.

Humane World for Animals urges a favorable report on SB 535 to provide animals in Maryland laboratories proper care and oversight.

Thank you,



Kathleen Conlee
Vice President, Animal Research Issues
Humane World for Animals

¹ United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. (1/17/23). Inspection report for BASI Gaithersburg. Retrieved from <https://aphis.my.site.com/PublicSearchTool/s/inspection-reports>

² United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. (6/7/22). Inspection report for Bioqual Inc. Retrieved from <https://aphis.my.site.com/PublicSearchTool/s/inspection-reports>

³ United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. (9/27/23). Inspection report for Bioqual Inc. Retrieved from <https://aphis.my.site.com/PublicSearchTool/s/inspection-reports>

⁴ United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. (3/1/23). Official warning for BASI Gaithersburg. Retrieved from <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal-care/awa-services/animal-welfare-horse-protection-actions>

⁵ United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. (8/10/22). Official warning for Bioqual Inc. Retrieved from <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal-care/awa-services/animal-welfare-horse-protection-actions>