

January 26, 2021

Executive Director Melinda Kelleher  
 Cumberland Downtown Development Commission

Via email: [REDACTED]

Dear Ms. Kelleher,

I am a wildlife veterinarian, writing on behalf of PETA and its more than 6.5 million members and supporters to urge you to reconsider using a live groundhog during your Groundhog Day festivities, which is a cruel and outdated tradition and puts the groundhog at risk of COVID-19 infection. I also ask that you refrain from partnering with Tri-State Zoological Park (Tri-State) owner Bob Candy. Candy was recently found to have committed egregious violations of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and a civil public nuisance suit is currently pending alleging violations of state cruelty-to-animals law against the animals currently at his facility. Please consider the following information.

Not only are there a host of zoonotic pathogens that groundhogs can transmit to humans, but groundhogs, among many other animals, may be highly susceptible to the SARS-CoV-2 virus that is responsible for COVID-19. Allowing a live groundhog to be brought out for public display would put your community and Murray, the groundhog, at risk—all because of an outdated tradition and for nothing more than human entertainment.

As a prey species, groundhogs are naturally shy, sensitive animals who actively avoid humans. When Murray is dragged out of his hibernation, transported to an unfamiliar location, and held up to flashing lights and gathered officials and members of the public, he has no idea what's happening. Being handled and forced into close proximity to the public causes these animals great stress, which can compromise his immune system and further increase his risk of contracting COVID-19 from those who handle or are in close proximity to him. Being relegated to the "care" of Bob Candy for the other days of the year is no life for any animal.

Candy also has a [long history](#) of animal welfare violations. In 2019, the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland issued [a ruling](#) in PETA's ESA lawsuit against Candy and two entities, including Tri-State, requiring that the big cats at the facility be transferred to an accredited sanctuary and prohibiting him from owning or possessing endangered or threatened species in the future. The court held that Tri-State harmed and harassed two lemurs, five tigers, and two lions in violation of federal law by displaying them in decrepit enclosures without appropriate companionship, potable water, or proper enrichment, food, or shelter and by denying them adequate veterinary care. Five endangered animals at issue in the suit died at Tri-State between 2016 and 2019, including a lemur who had ripped off the tip of his penis and a tiger named India who was so ravaged by sepsis that pus-filled pockets had formed in her heart, tongue, and diaphragm. The court found that all of these animals died prematurely and endured tragic deaths, and that Tri-State's failure to provide them with adequate veterinary care violated the ESA.

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PETA FOUNDATION IS AN  
 OPERATING NAME OF FOUNDATION  
 TO SUPPORT ANIMAL PROTECTION.

**AFFILIATES:**

- PETA U.S.
- PETA Asia
- PETA India
- PETA France
- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA Foundation (U.K.)

Times change. Traditions evolve. It's long overdue for live animal displays to be relegated to the history books. Using technologically advanced electromechanical devices such as animatronics instead of live animals is more popular than ever and could bring your town's annual tradition in a fresh, humane, and innovative direction.

In light of this information, we hope you will stand up for these vulnerable animals by refusing to use a live groundhog for your festivities and refusing to partner with Bob Candy. Please understand that these facilities and exhibitors are not always what they seem. Your community looks to you for guidance, and you have the ability to help protect animals, your community, and everyone's health and well-being in so many ways.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



**Monica K. H. Bando, MS, BVSc, PhD, MRCVS**  
Wildlife Veterinarian, Captive Animal Law Enforcement

