

January 25, 2023

Robert Gibbens, DVM
Director, Animal Welfare Operations
USDA/APHIS/Animal Care

Via e-mail: [REDACTED] animalcare@usda.gov

Re: Request to Investigate Kokas Exotics (License No. 31-A-0031) for Planned Exhibition in Apparent Violation of the Animal Welfare Act

Dear Dr. Gibbens,

I'm writing on behalf of PETA to request that the USDA investigate Craig Kokas (license no. 31-A-0031) for apparently planning to exhibit a groundhog at a public event on February 2, 2023 (located at the studio for the WMRN-AM radio station, 1330 N. Main St., Marion, Ohio, 43302), in violation of the requirements and restrictions applicable to his Class A license under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). *See* 9 C.F.R. §§ 1.1, 2.1(b)(1).

According to [WMRN's advertising for its Groundhog Day event](#) (*see* Exhibit 1), Craig Kokas' business "Kokas Exotics" will be supplying a groundhog for public exhibition. Kokas has reportedly admitted to supplying a groundhog for exhibition "annually,"¹ and news reports confirm that he supplied an animal for this event in 2017,² 2018,³ 2020,⁴ 2021,⁵ and 2022⁶ (*see* Exhibit 2). On August 31, 2022, the USDA cited Kokas for engaging in regulated activity not authorized under his Class A license, specifically identifying the Groundhog Day event as unlawful exhibition.⁷ Kokas was informed that he had to obtain a Class B or C license to lawfully exhibit any animals, and yet according to Animal Care's Public Search Tool, as of January 24, 2023, Kokas still holds an active Class A license, and no other license appears for any licensee with the Kokas name.

¹ *See* USDA Inspection Report, Craig Kokas, License No. 31-A-0031, August 31, 2022, citing for a violation of 9 C.F.R. § 2.1(b)(1) and stating that Kokas "has conducted activities not authorized by a Class-A License. During inspection the licensee pointed out a groundhog which he stated is used annually for exhibition purposes."

² "[Chuck's keeper is Craig Kokas.](#)" January 30, 2017.

³ "[Ohio's Official Groundhog, Buckeye Chuck, makes his Springtime prediction!! Thanks \[to\] Kokas Exotic Animals.](#)" February 2, 2018.

⁴ "[This fella came from my friend's breeding facility, Kokas's Exotics. Congratulations Ashley Kokas!](#)" February 2, 2020.

⁵ "[Ashley Kokas of Kokas Exotics holds Buckeye Chuck during the 2021 Groundhog Day festivities at WMRN studios in Marion.](#)" January 29, 2022 (photo from 2021).

⁶ "[Buckeye Chuck and Ashley Kokas from Kokas Exotics pose for a photo with some kids who attended the 2022 Groundhog Day celebration at WMRN-AM.](#)" February 2, 2022.

⁷ *See* USDA Inspection Report, Craig Kokas, License No. 31-A-0031, August 31, 2022, stating that Kokas "confirmed that the last exhibition took place on groundhog's day (2/2/22)."

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS
FOUNDATION

Washington
1536 16th St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202-483-PETA

Los Angeles
2154 W. Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90026
323-644-PETA

Norfolk
501 Front St.
Norfolk, VA 23510
757-622-PETA

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Kokas is clearly aware that exhibiting at the Groundhog Day event would violate the AWA, yet he is apparently planning to provide a regulated animal for public exhibition once again without the proper license as required under 9 C.F.R. § 2.1(b)(1). Kokas has repeatedly proven that he cannot comply with the AWA, receiving 74 citations in 2022 alone—23 of which were incurred *after* the USDA suspended Kokas' license for 21 days due to his numerous willful violations of the AWA.

In light of Kokas' continued chronic failure to comply with the AWA and apparent intent to engage in further unlawful activity, PETA respectfully renews its request that the USDA take drastic enforcement action to the fullest extent of the law, including terminating Kokas' license. (*See* PETA's correspondence dated November 15, 2022.)

Please hold Craig Kokas and any other responsible parties fully accountable for all violations that you discover during your investigation.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please inform me of the complaint number that your agency assigns to this correspondence.

Very truly yours,



Debbie Metzler, M.S.
Director of Captive Animal Welfare

