

December 19, 2022

USDA/APHIS/Animal Care

Via e-mail: Animalcare@usda.gov

Re: Request for Investigation of Apparent Animal Welfare Act Violations
by Zachery Keeler dba Even Keel Exotics (License No. 34-B-0225)

Dear Animal Care,

I am writing on behalf of PETA to request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) investigate Zachery Keeler dba Even Keel Exotics (License No. 34-B-0225) for the following apparent violations of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) involving the improper handling of a capybara.

On December 9, 2022, a local news station in Temperance, MI posted an [article](#) about Keeler which included footage of Keeler handling a capybara. (See [Video 1](#).) During an interview to discuss Keeler's previous 70 AWA violations, Keeler aggressively grappled with the capybara while he was struggling to get away, in order to pose for a photo with him, while holding him by the neck. Keeler asked the reporter not to include that footage in the final report (at 1:14). The capybara appeared to be non-weight bearing on his right front foot before Keeler even entered the enclosure with him, visible at the beginning of the video. Ultimately the capybara was breathing heavily from stress (at 0:57) and had a bloody nose from the struggle (Keeler states at 1:40 "let's not film him 'cause he's got a little bit of a bloody nose. . . he hit his nose on the ground when I was trying to pick him up").

Please inspect this animal and his veterinary records and ensure that he has been treated by a veterinarian for both the apparent leg injury and the effects of this rough handling episode pursuant to 9 C.F.R. § 2.40.

The behavior exhibited by this animal suggests that Keeler isn't exhibiting him "in a manner that does not cause ... physical harm, or unnecessary discomfort" or "under conditions consistent with their good health and well-being," in apparent violation of 9 C.F.R. § 2.131(b)(1) and (d)(1). Furthermore, Keeler's actions appear to be a violation of 9 C.F.R. § 2.131(c)(1), which states in part "[d]uring public exhibition, animals must be handled so there is *minimal risk of harm to the animal* (emphasis added)."

Please ensure that this capybara is provided with adequate veterinary care and that he/she is otherwise handled in accordance with the AWA. Please hold the licensee fully accountable for any and all violations that you discover during your investigation.

Thank you for your timely attention to this matter. Please inform me of the complaint number that is assigned to this correspondence.

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PETA FOUNDATION IS AN OPERATING
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SUPPORT ANIMAL PROTECTION.

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

Very truly yours,

Meghan Tiemann

Meghan Tiemann
Wildlife Specialist, Captive Animal Law Enforcement