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September 26, 2014

Via Facsimile & USPS

Honorable Ms. Phyllis Fong, Inspector General
USDA, Office of Inspector General
12th and Independence Avenue, S.W.- Room 117-W
Washington, D.C. 20250
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Re: FORMAL COMPLAINT AGAINST USDA-ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE (APHIS)

Dear Honorable Ms. Phyllis Fong,

Please be advised that this law firm, REEG LAWYERS, LLC, represents our client, The Cavalry Group, LLC, a member-based organization made up of animal owners, animal-related businesses, and related corporate concerns the mission of which is, in part, to protect and defend the legal and Constitutional rights of law abiding animal owners and animal-based enterprises across America. On behalf of The Cavalry Group we are hereby filing a **formal complaint** against USDA-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). This complaint arises out of actions taken by APHIS in conjunction with and during the "*Lions, Tigers and Bears Symposium*" that was held in *Kansas City, MO, July 8-9, 2014*.

When USDA-APHIS announced the symposium, it was billed as an educational and informational opportunity geared toward individuals and groups currently licensed and regulated by APHIS. Past symposia, which our members have attended, included presenters who were experts in their respective fields and provided valuable information in an objective, unbiased and non-judgmental manner. The atmosphere of previous events put on by APHIS has been professional and cordial, where participants, including our members, have felt comfortable asking questions and interacting with APHIS personnel and presenters.

The tenor of this symposium, however, was far from what it has been at past events. The environment of this year's event was such that our members were intimidated, harassed and came away frightened and very concerned for the continued existence of their enterprises. It is the permeation of this year's event by an inappropriately slanted, judgmental, disrespectful, and hostile environment which existed throughout the event, coupled with conduct that appears to have invaded our members' individual civil rights, that is the subject of this complaint.

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First, several of our members were specifically singled out and arbitrarily subjected each day of the event to invasive and excessive security searches by armed security personnel. This unnecessary treatment included automobile searches and the detention of one of our members for an unreasonable amount of time in a separate holding room. No rational reason for singling them out and holding them was ever given. Additionally, one member was ordered to delete legally taken photos from their phone. In short, they were invited by USDA to attend this event and then disrespected and treated like criminals once they were there. Others in attendance, i.e. those with ties to animal rights groups, were not subjected to the same intrusive and intimidating searches that our members were subjected to. The actions of APHIS security personnel, especially the detention of our member in a separate holding room for over a half an hour without just cause and any explanation, in our view, violated Constitutional and individual civil rights; at a minimum this was most certainly arbitrary, disparate, strong-arming, intimidating and discriminatory treatment.

Second, seven of the 18 subject presenters were people whose personal philosophy is hostile toward keeping exotics in captivity, against captive breeding of exotics, against hand raising of any wild animals, and who have strong ties with animal rights groups actively lobbying for laws and regulation banning exotic ownership completely.

Because of this, one third (1/3) of the presentations during the two day symposium were heavily slanted philosophically toward animal rights and not animal welfare. This heavy animal rights slant took away from any true animal welfare message APHIS may have been attempting to make, and it made for a very uncomfortable and hostile atmosphere for USDA licensees. Information delivered by these speakers was not conveyed with the intent of objectively assisting and educating, but with the biased intent of advocating the anti-captivity/anti-ownership philosophy, and came across as judgmental, accusatory, and certainly not at all supportive of the life's work and passion our members have put into the health and well-being of their animals.

Our members and the vast majority of USDA licensees are abiding by USDA and other animal welfare laws and regulations. They have been in the exotics industry for decades and are experts in their field. By allowing the animal rights agenda to dominate the symposium, APHIS allowed those groups hostile to USDA exotics licensees to control the narrative surrounding exotic ownership and are permitting the animal rights zealots to drown out the current voices of licensees, who are the true animal advocates. Our members and USDA licensees in general deserved to be treated fairly and objectively by USDA and APHIS; this did not happen at this symposium. It should be an embarrassment to USDA and APHIS, should not be tolerated, and those responsible within the organization should be severely disciplined for their malicious actions.

It was clear to our members at this symposium, that instead of being the objective regulatory body they are tasked with being, APHIS is clearly giving the animal rights ideologues a platform to advance their anti-ownership agenda. After the first day of the symposium, where they listened to four clearly animal rights individuals speak, they voiced to us that they felt truly

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scared of what was to become of their livelihoods given that APHIS seemed to be allowing the animal rights groups to dictate the discussion and issues.

When you look at other events transpiring within the world of exotic ownership and animal rights groups, our members' concern is not at all unfounded. For instance, it was mentioned at the meeting that the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the main animal rights group pushing a clear, anti-private ownership agenda, is in the process of a multi-million dollar expansion of their Black Beauty Ranch that will house large exotics, such as big cats and bears. (The manager of Black Beauty Ranch was one of the speakers at the symposium where he was permitted to define what a "reputable sanctuary" is.)

It is well known that HSUS is openly lobbying for exotics bans in many states. It is not a far stretch to think that they are so confident in their ability to successfully push their agenda that they are building a facility to house all of the animals which will be confiscated once the bans are in place. Or alternatively, that they are being successful in shaping the policies within USDA-APHIS such that more restrictions will be put on current licensees resulting in more violations, which ultimately results in more animal confiscations due to violations. The evidence that HSUS and other animal rights groups are shaping APHIS policy is clearly evidenced by their extensive involvement and "front and center" position in this year's symposium. Our members and other current licensees went to the symposium in good faith to learn only to find out that the activists whose main goal is to see them put out of business were leading and driving the discussion and are in a strong position to negatively and permanently affect our members' lives, their animals, and their businesses.

An article was recently published in the Washington Times where a watchdog group is alleging that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was colluding with environmental lobbying groups to shape EPA policy to benefit the environmentalists and advance their agenda. What transpired at the APHIS symposium appears to parallel these allegations of inappropriately close relationships between a government agency and lobby/advocacy groups. It was abundantly clear at the symposium that HSUS and the animal rights lobby are pressuring USDA and are, in fact, inappropriately affecting agency policy. APHIS needs to remain neutral and unbiased and should not be favoring or colluding with groups whose sole purpose is to punish or put the people regulated by APHIS out of business.

In addition, APHIS has hired a number of animal rights ideologues and former employees of the Humane Society of the U.S who now hold high level positions within APHIS overseeing enforcement of animal owners and animal enterprises across the country. A glaring example of this bias is Sarah Conant, former litigation attorney for HSUS who is now Chief Inspector for Animal Health Enforcement Investigative and Enforcement Services at USDA.

We have sworn affidavits from the members who were adversely affected by the heavy-handed security measures to which they were subjected and by the entire negative and biased tenor of the symposium. Due to concerns about retaliation against these individuals, we are not including them at this time. However, you choose to formally investigate these allegations,

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which is the request The Cavalry Group is making, we will make those statements and these witnesses available to you.

If you have questions or would like further information, please don't hesitate to contact me or Mindy Patterson, President of The Cavalry Group at 855-748-4210.

Respectfully submitted:
REEG LAWYERS, LLC



By: Kurtis B. Reeg
Managing Partner

cc: Ms. Mindy Patterson, The Cavalry Group