

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 2, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Leader McCarthy, and Leader McConnell:

A bipartisan amendment to the House’s COMPETES Act prohibits mink farming in the U.S., due to the substantial public health risk from zoonotic mink-origin COVID-19 variants (along with the grossly inhumane treatment of the animals for a luxury export). Conferees should retain this provision, originally introduced as a free-standing bill in the House.

Humans (*Homo sapiens*) and the American mink (*Neovison vison*) are the only two species documented to contract the virus in large numbers and to be able to spill it back to other species – with more than 21 million captive mink ([includes culling](#)) and more than [6.2 million people](#) perishing directly as a result of the pandemic.

- In short, a massive worldwide SARS-CoV-2 epidemic in farmed mink has paralleled the human COVID-19 pandemic, with outbreaks [on at least 450 mink farms in 13 countries in Europe, Canada, and the United States](#). The virus infected a third of the U.S.’s 60 or so mink farms (down from more than 7,000 mink farms a half century ago).
- Mink farms might be best described as viral time bombs planted in dozens of locations in our country. As SARS-CoV-2 “super-recipients” and “super-spreaders,” [mink easily catch the virus from infected farm workers, quickly spread it to virtually all mink, and then spill the virus back to people](#), sometimes as a dangerous mutant that resists vaccines and treatments.
- As highly aggressive hunter-predators, captive mink often [injure, kill, and even cannibalize weaker cage-mates](#). Because of stress-related susceptibility to infectious diseases (especially respiratory) from captivity, inbreeding to produce an array of coat colors, dense overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, a poor-quality diet of slaughterhouse offal, mink on farms are highly vulnerable to the spread of SARS-CoV-2.
- Farmed mink in [Denmark, France, and Michigan](#) spawned [noxious SARS-CoV-2 mutants that collectively infected thousands of people](#). Denmark and the Netherlands slaughtered all 20 million (a third of global population) of their mink, ending mink farming in two of the four biggest mink-farming nations in the world. This pandemic-

prevention work arrested the advance of the dangerous “Cluster 5” mink variant, which threatened to spread to millions of people across the globe.

- Unlike Europe, [we have no active or mandatory COVID-19 surveillance or testing of mink farms or farmers by federal \(CDC, USDA\) or state agencies](#) charged with protecting the public’s health nor mandatory mink culls on infected farms nor mink-isolate genetic sequencing.

[Farmed mink that have escaped can infect wild mink with COVID-19](#), potentially creating an ineradicable reservoir of SARS-CoV-2 in North America, just like rabies, plague, and brucellosis have taken permanent hold in our native wildlife populations.

Americans have lost their appetite for fur, and major designers and retailers no longer sell fur. US-produced mink pelts go to China, where a small sliver of elite consumers wrap themselves in fur as a luxury fashion item, thus outsourcing the viral risks to our homeland.

[The US mink industry generated 1.4 million pelts \(5% of global production\) at a farm-gate value of just \\$47.4 million in 2020](#) (with costs exceeding revenues by millions). It makes little sense to keep afloat a dying, subsidized mink industry that threatens human and wildlife health for a luxury fashion item that Americans do not want.

With the collapse of more than half of the global mink farming industry, we may see a domestic surge in this inhumane and dangerous factory farming practice. China failed to act in shutting down its live wildlife markets, spawning the pandemic that has killed millions and cost trillions of dollars.

Mink farms have the potential to complicate and compromise the nation’s multi-trillion-dollar COVID-19 control efforts, our national herd immunity, and the personal and professional sacrifices millions have undertaken – all for the sake of an export industry that produces a luxury product not consumed in the U.S. any longer and designed now for a small number of Chinese elites.

Sincerely,



Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress



Nancy Mace
Member of Congress



Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
André D. Carson
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
Lance Gooden
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
Andy Levin
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
Alma S. Adams, PhD
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
Jamaal Bowman
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____
Troy A. Carter, Sr.
Member of Congress

CC: Members of the Conference Committee