

July 7, 2020

The Honorable Nury Martinez, President Los Angeles City Council
The Honorable David Ryu, Chair of Health, Education, Neighborhoods, Parks, Arts and River
Committee
Los Angeles City Hall
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Motion 20-0425 Support for Sale of Living Animals for Human Consumption / Prohibition

Dear Councilmembers:

Thank you for all your work during the Covid-19 crisis. We are very grateful for your continued service in a tough situation. This has been an extraordinary time, one we hope not to repeat.

It is with that in mind that I am writing you today. I am the President of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, an organization with many Los Angeles physician members. As you know, Covid-19 is currently being carried by a substantial proportion of Californians, as is true in many other states, and is expected to re-emerge repeatedly. Like influenza A viruses, it is subject to mutations and reassortment, creating novel variants that may be more pathogenic or less so.

We believe that the presence of live animal markets sets the stage for the emergence of novel viruses. As you may know, in 2015 the CDC reported findings from two live animal markets in Minnesota, finding clear evidence of animal-to-human viral transmission, in that case influenza A. The virus was identified, not only in the animals (86%), rail samplings (24%), and air samples (67%), but also in 65% of employees. It was also detected in a market customer. The parallels with Covid-19 are clear. It is likely that market employees and customers carrying the virus may contribute, not only to viral spread, but to a reassortment process, similar to that that led to the influenza pandemics of 1957 and 1968. The live animals in markets carry their own viruses, which may combine with others they acquire from other animals or human contacts.

It is against that background that we ask your support for a ban on live animal markets in the City of Los Angeles as both a lifesaving response to the current public health crisis and a strong commitment to preventing the return of this deadly virus or its progeny. As you are no doubt aware, health authorities speak with one voice on this issue.

Live markets may transmit other diseases, as well. According to the CDC, the majority of new or emerging infectious diseases in people have come from animals, leading to morbidity, mortality, and economic harm.

To prevent the introduction, transmission, and spread of communicable diseases in the United States, we are seeking regulations that prohibit the sale, transfer, donation, other commercial or

public offering, or transportation, in interstate or intrastate commerce, of live birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians to retail facilities that hold live animals intended for human consumption.

On April 7, we asked U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams, MD, MPH, to invoke his authority, which is clearly available, if rarely used, to shut down U.S. live animal markets. Shortly thereafter, 66 Members of Congress sent a letter to the general directors of the World Health Organization, the United Nations, and the World Organisation for Animal Health to shut down live animal markets.

Our many local members will be eager to support your efforts in this regard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Neal D. Barnard MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Neal D. Barnard, MD, FACC
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President, Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine
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