

September 27, 2019

Governor Ned Lamont  
State Capitol  
210 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

**RE: Request for action to help send the elephant Minnie to an accredited sanctuary**

Dear Governor Lamont:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and our supporters, we are writing to express our deep concern about the welfare of Minnie, a 47-year old Asian elephant owned by the Commerford Zoo, and to urge you to take action to help free her to one of the two accredited sanctuaries in the United States: The Performing Animal Welfare Society (“PAWS”), or The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee (“TES”).

For over three decades, the Commerford Zoo has forced Minnie, along with two other wild-born elephants, Beulah and Karen, to labor at circuses and fairs under threat of a bullhook, including performing tricks and giving rides to groups of children and adults. Claiming the elephants are “family,” the Commerford Zoo has continued to exploit them despite the physical and emotional harms this exploitation is known to cause.

On September 15, 2019, Beulah collapsed and died at the Big E fair after the Commerford Zoo exploited her for profit one final time. On September 20, 2019, the USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service confirmed Karen died in March 2019. The circumstances surrounding Karen’s death remain unknown. Both elephants suffered for decades as a result of their forced labor and regular transport to events across the Northeast, but their lives were no less terrible while imprisoned on the Commerford Zoo property in Goshen, CT.

Minnie—whom the Commerford Zoo forced to give rides as recently as this summer despite documented incidents in which she attacked her handlers and members of the public, as traumatized elephants often do—still has the opportunity to heal and live freely. Both TES and PAWS have offered to provide her with lifetime care at no cost to the Commerford Zoo. Because Minnie is now without the company of other elephants and remains in an environment radically unsuited to elephant well-being, the need for her release is more urgent than ever.

For over 30 years, the state of Connecticut and the federal government have allowed Beulah, Karen, and Minnie to suffer. Although the Commerford Zoo has been cited over 50 times for violations of the Animal Welfare Act, including for failure to provide adequate veterinary care,

and many people have observed the elephants being jabbed with sharp bullhooks, engaging in stereotypical behavior, and in visible distress, enforcement officials and lawmakers have done absolutely nothing.

For Minnie's sake, please publicly call on the Commerford Zoo to promptly release her to a sanctuary. If the Commerford Zoo does not do so, please take all appropriate and necessary action to investigate the mounting welfare concerns for Minnie.

Sincerely,

Courtney Fern  
Director of Government Relations  
Nonhuman Rights Project

Rachel Mathews  
Deputy Director, Captive Law Enforcement  
PETA Foundation

Annie Hornish  
Connecticut State Director  
The Humane Society of the United States

Carrie LeBlanc  
Executive Director  
CompassionWorks International

Stephanie Harris  
Senior Legislative Affairs Manager  
Animal Legal Defense Fund

Debbie Ethell  
Executive Director  
The KOTA Foundation for Elephants

Jo-Anne Basile  
Executive Director  
CT Votes for Animals

Laura Bridgeman  
Elephant Campaign Manager  
In Defense of Animals

K. Jett  
Executive Manager  
Animal Defenders International

Jill Alibrandi  
Connecticut Residents Seeking Sanctuary for  
the Commerford Animals

Sheryl Becker  
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Western Massachusetts Animal Rights  
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Barbara Lovett  
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Save Nosey Now, Inc.

Sandra Clinger  
President  
The Elephant Advocacy Project