



VOTERS FOR ANIMAL RIGHTS

786 Jefferson Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11221
vfar.org

2021 New York City Council Candidate Questionnaire

About Us

Launched in 2017, Voters For Animal Rights (VFAR) is a New York based 501c(4) grassroots multi-issue animal advocacy organization that is building political power for animals. In 2020, VFAR helped elect our former board member, Jabari Brisport, to the New York State Senate. In 2019, VFAR led the successful campaign to ban foie gras in NYC, to stop wild bird poaching and to establish an Office of Animal Welfare within the Mayor's Office. In 2017 we led the campaign to ban the use of wild animals in circuses in NYC. We look forward to working with you to win more victories for animals and make New York City a leader in compassionate public policy.

Our mission is to help elect candidates who support animal protection, lobby for stronger laws to stop animal cruelty, and hold elected officials accountable to humane voters. VFAR mobilizes public concern for animals through the political process. We know that animal protection is not only a moral issue but a bi-partisan political issue as well. Over 90% of Americans believe that animals need protection from abuse and exploitation. To that end, we organize humane voters to support candidates that care about animals. If you support animals, then we want to support you! There are over 60,000 humane voters throughout New York state, hundreds of which are volunteers for VFAR who are ready to knock on doors, make phone calls and get out the vote to elect people who will stand up for animals. We deliver the vote – for the animals and for you.

As an example, here is our [animal-friendly voter guide](#) from the 2020 NYS General Elections.

Endorsement Process

Candidates seeking VFAR's endorsement for the 2021 New York City Council primary elections are required to fill out this questionnaire, which will be posted on our website. Submit to woof@vfar.org by **November 20, 2020**. Please let us know if you need more time.

Questions

If you have any questions about the topics in our questionnaire, please don't hesitate to reach out to allie@vfar.org and david@vfar.org. We are happy to help you better understand animal protection policy, and we're happy to advise your campaign.



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Candidate Contact Information & Campaign Information

Candidate Name	Pronouns	Cell Phone	Email
Kevin Richards		[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Campaign Manager	Pronouns	Cell Phone	Email
Michelle Koller		[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
District #	Borough		
49	Staten Island		

Neighborhoods In Your District

Party Democrat Office Sought city council

Incumbent/Challenger/Open Seat: open seat

Name of Campaign Committee: Richards for city council

Campaign Field Office Address: 15 Nassau Street, Staten Island, NY 10301

Campaign Website: richardsforcitycouncil.com

Social Media Handles (Facebook/Twitter/Instagram): Kelvin Richards for city council District 49

Occupation or Employer: Public Defender / Attorney

Organizational Affiliations (if any): Legal Aid Society

Endorsements (if any): N/A



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Personal Initiatives

1. Do you feel that promoting the humane treatment of animals should be a priority for the New York City Council?

Yes, I feel that humane treatment of animals should be a priority

2. What achievements or advocacy for animals are you most proud of, e.g. supporting humane legislation, adopting a shelter pet, volunteering with an animal rescue organization, supporting any national or local animal protection orgs, living a plant-based (vegan or vegetarian) lifestyle, etc.? Did you grow up with or currently live with any companion animals?

While I am not an animal owner, I recognize that pets bring joy to many and can be helpers and healers.

3. What animal issues will you prioritize and lead on as a member of the New York City Council? How would you work to empower the animal advocacy community to reach new success and growth into the 2022-2025 term, and ensure that New York is on the forefront of animal protection?

I would like to help manage the deer populations on Staten Island by supporting vasectomies to reduce their numbers. I do not support controlled hunting of the population on Staten Island.

4. Do you have, or would you consider developing, a platform on animal protection issues and posting the information onto your campaign website to outline your positions? If you receive an endorsement from VFAR, will you promote our endorsement on your website and social media pages?

Yes, I will support the platform and can post information, actions and positions of VAR

5. Will you commit to designating a member of your staff to handle animal issues?

Yes, we can commit to having a member of staff accessible to VAR to help amplify local issues

6. Do you believe that the pursuit of animal rights is part of a broader vision of social justice? Please explain your answer.

I believe that animal rights can support the wider issue of social justice. How we treat animals, protect environments where they live, also affects people as well. It is important to treat animals and human beings with respect and dignity and ensure that our environments are safe and clean.



Positions on Legislation and Policy

1. New York City's Companion Animals

A. Increased Funding for ACC and Independent Animal Rescue Organizations

Animal Care Centers of NYC (ACC) is a non-profit organization contracted with the New York City Department of Health to manage New York City's three full-service municipal animal shelters located in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Staten Island, as well as two admissions centers located in the Bronx and Queens. ACC is an open admission shelter required by law to accept every animal brought through its doors and cannot turn away any animal like most other shelters, whether arriving due to homelessness, family crisis, abuse, or abandonment. ACC relies on public funding for operational costs necessary to save and find homes for these animals in need, but resources are needed to ensure that these facilities always have sufficient capacity, staff and other resources to increase adoptions, perform spay and neuter operations, provide pet retention services and other efforts to ensure a successful and humane NYC shelter system.

Do you pledge to allocate funding to maintain ACC and other non-profit animal rescue organizations?

YES NO

Additional Comments:

B. Trap Neuter and Release (TNR) of feral cats

Tens of thousands of stray and feral cats, collectively called community cats, live in the outdoor spaces of New York City. They live in groups called colonies, and they establish themselves near human activity — in backyards, around businesses, in parking lots, etc. — attracted by a food source such as trash or rodents. Community cats have no legal guardian, though many people care for them by feeding and sometimes providing outdoor shelter. These cats are not socialized to humans. They are timid and fearful around people and are not suited for adoption. Because most of these cats are not suited to living indoors, bringing them to a shelter is not the humane answer. Taking them to a shelter also doesn't solve the population problem — if cats are simply removed from an area, others will soon move in and breed. This is called the "Vacuum Effect."

The most humane and effective approach to managing the growing population of community cats is Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR). In TNR, entire colonies of community cats are trapped, sterilized, vaccinated, ear tipped, and returned to their territory of origin. TNR halts reproduction and many of the nuisance behaviors associated with unneutered cats, such as yowling, fighting, and marking territory. The cats are healthier, free from the stresses of mating and motherhood. TNR also includes colony management to ensure the cats' well-being and their peaceful coexistence with the rest of the community. Community cat programs not only provide life-saving options for cats who might otherwise be euthanized when admitted to a shelter but also can stabilize, and even reduce over



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time, the population of community cat colonies. Such efforts require support and funding and rely on many thousands of volunteer hours and out-of-pocket expenses incurred by dedicated New Yorkers.

Do you pledge to support increasing funding to programs that support these community cat operations?

YES NO

Additional Comments:

2. Pursuing a More Humane City: Education, Health Care, and Social Services

A. Pet-Friendly Housing

As New York City continues to experience a housing affordability crisis with high displacement rates, housing must be accessible to people with companion animals. Keeping people and companion animals together reduces the burden on animal shelters and allowing New Yorkers to stay in their homes. This is a particularly significant concern for especially vulnerable populations such as low-income families, the elderly, and victims of domestic violence. Housing legislation and policy should expand affordable pet friendly housing options as well as the ability of those experiencing homelessness and victims of domestic violence to seek refuge in shelters with their pets.

Would you support and vote for legislation soon to be introduced (Brannan, Cabrera) which would preserve the right of individuals over the age of 62 to not be denied housing on the basis of having a companion animal?

YES NO

Additional comments:

B. Homeless Services Accommodations for Companion Animals

Currently, shelters provided by or under contract with the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) do not allow or accommodate pets. Individuals seeking shelter are forced to abandon their animals to be admitted, and thus, often choose to live on city streets. More info [here](#) and [here](#).

Would you support and vote for Intro 1483 (Levin), which would require the DHS, in collaboration with the Department of Social Services, to develop a plan to accommodate pets of homeless individuals and families with the objective of providing pet-friendly shelters and identifying other temporary pet care arrangements that would allow homeless pet-owners to keep their companion animals?

YES NO



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Would you support and vote for **Intro 1484 (Levin)**, which would require DHS to report, on a monthly basis, information on the placement or disposition of companion animals that belong to people who enter homeless shelters?

YES NO

Additional Comments:

C. Fulfilling New York's Humane Education Mandate

Section 809 of the New York State Education Law requires instruction in the "humane treatment and protection of animals ... in every elementary school under state control or supported wholly or partly by public money of the state." Although there is a penalty for non-compliance, the legislation has remained unenforced, and many educators and administrators are unaware of this statutory requirement. [More info.](#)

Would you support and vote for **Intro 1465 (Dromm)**, which would require the Department of Education to report on humane animal treatment instruction in public elementary schools?

YES NO

Additional Comments:

D. Animals Used for Experimentation: School Hatching Projects

Principals and school teachers should end the use of bird-hatching projects and replace them with learning activities that teach life processes without the use of live animals. School classroom incubation and hatching projects of baby chicks and ducks is cruel and leads to the abandonment and death of countless young birds each year. Once the eggs develop and the cute baby birds grow up, schools realize that they have no plan for the adult birds. These hatching-project birds are deprived of a mother hen to raise them, which may lead to developmental issues. The birds are often abandoned in city parks where they cannot survive on their own or dumped at local animal shelters and rescues who are already overburdened with unwanted animals.

Hatching projects encourage the view that animals are disposable objects instead of living creatures requiring a lifetime of care and commitment. Humane alternatives have been developed by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), HEART, and other humane educators. [More info here.](#)

Would you support and vote for legislation that would prohibit New York City schools from using mail-ordered eggs, live baby chickens and ducks for classroom projects?

YES NO



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Would you co-sign a letter urging the NYC Schools Chancellor to ban the use of eggs, live baby chickens and ducks for classroom projects?

YES NO

Additional Comments:

E. Fireworks

The booming sounds of fireworks are terrifying and overwhelming for pets and wildlife, as well as for veterans with PTSD, children on the autism spectrum, and survivors of gun violence. According to the ASPCA, more dogs get lost on the Fourth of July than any other day of the year due to panicking and running off. On July 5th shelters notoriously have increased numbers of frightened lost pets. Additionally, baby birds and other infant wildlife become orphaned and starve to death as their parents panic from the sounds and take off. Wildlife are known to race into the road to escape the sounds, resulting in dangerous car collisions. A solution that has been instituted in many cities in Europe and Canada are silent fireworks. Silent fireworks deliver the same beautiful cascading colors but without the daunting decibels and startling explosions. Read more here.

Would you support and vote for legislation that would require all fireworks displays to be of the silent type?

YES NO

Additional Comments:

3. Animals Used For Food

A. Factory Farms

As the global COVID-19 pandemic exposes the dangers inherent in our highly concentrated food system, legislation introduced by Senator Cory Booker, co-sponsored by Senator Elizabeth Warren, as well as its House companion, introduced by Rep. Ro Khanna, would place a moratorium on new and expanding factory farms and provide a transition for farmers who want to transition out of operating a factory farm. The scale, density, and practices associated with Large Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) aka Factory Farms are heinously cruel to animals and present a range of public health, worker safety, and environmental problems.

Would you support and vote for a New York City Council resolution calling on Congress to adopt S.3221/H.R.6718, legislation to end factory farming?

YES NO



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The Green New Deal is a set of policy proposals that seeks to transform our energy system to 100% renewable energy while creating jobs needed to solve the climate crisis, and ensuring a just transition for workers and vulnerable communities, and has the potential to improve the welfare of countless animals, wild and domestic. The Green New Deal calls for massive investments in weatherization, public transportation, modern infrastructure and high-speed broadband, reducing emissions throughout the world, transitioning to sustainable farming, conserving public lands as wildlife habitat, as well as holding the fossil fuel industry accountable for our current environmental crises.

Do you support the New York State and/or federal Green New Deal legislation?

YES NO

Do you believe the Green New Deal does enough to address the impact of CAFOs?

YES NO

Would you support and vote for Res. 1151 (Constantinides) calling on corporate and government entities operating in New York City to divest from agricultural industries that benefit from deforestation and the acceleration of global warming?

YES NO

What do you believe the NYC Council should do to end factory farming? Additional Comments:

B. Live Animal Slaughter Markets and Transportation

There are 80+ slaughterhouses and live animal markets in NYC – more than any other U.S. city. These facilities in New York are functionally no different than the live animal markets abroad where Coronavirus started. In addition to horrific treatment of animals in these facilities (tiny cages, no vet care, severely limited food and water), these facilities pose a significant health and safety hazard to the community affecting the quality of life for neighborhood residents. Blood, feces, urine, body parts, and feathers are routinely found on our public sidewalks and streets due to the unsanitary conditions associated with slaughterhouses. Many of these slaughterhouses are located close to schools and playgrounds. Of critical concern, these facilities are rarely if ever inspected by regulators, and despite the animal cruelty and other impacts of these facilities, there is no meaningful oversight.

Especially in light of COVID-19 and the threat of pandemics that are believed to originate from crowded, unsanitary animal markets, would you support and vote for legislation to increase regulations, inspections and reporting requirements for live animal markets and other facilities in New York City where live animals are kept, and increased penalties for health code or animal cruelty violations?

YES NO



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Would you support and vote for legislation that would require licensed slaughterhouses in New York City to have video recording systems in all areas with live animals?

YES NO

Additional Comments:

C. Shipments of Live Animals

Small animals such as chicks are regularly shipped through the US Postal Service. This terribly cruel practice is tragically routine. They are not provided with any food and water, and many animals suffer terribly or perish during transit. It is not uncommon for thousands of animals to be transported this way in the same shipment. The result is that animals often arrive at their destinations dead.

Would you support and vote for legislation that bans or restricts the shipment of live animals into New York City through the mail?

YES NO

Additional Comments:

D. Restaurants

Would you support and vote for Intro. 1405 (Dromm), which would offer clarity for consumers who wish to avoid animal-derived food products and allergens?

This legislation would require the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to establish a food protection course and certification program for restaurants to demonstrate compliance with food allergen safety, and require restaurants to post a sign for customers on food allergen awareness. The bill would also establish a voluntary certification program for food service establishments who advertise themselves as capable of accommodating certain dietary restrictions, such as gluten-free, nut-free, vegetarian, and vegan, among others.

YES NO

Additional Comments:

E. Aquatic Animals

There is widespread scientific consensus that aquatic animals such as fish, lobsters, octopus, squid, and other marine life can experience pain and suffering. Cruel and neglectful treatment of all animals, including aquatic animals, is a misdemeanor under New York State law. See, N.Y. Agric. & Mkts. Law



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§ 353. New York courts have held that intentionally causing extreme pain to a pet fish is a felony. See, *People v Garcia*, 29 A.D.3d 255, 257, (App. Div. 1st Dept.). In spite of this prohibition, commercially farmed aquatic animals live in filthy, barren tanks so overcrowded they can barely swim and where they are victims of disease outbreak, rough handling, and months to years of psychological deprivation.

Would you support legislation to establish minimum animal welfare standards for procurement of aquatic animal products by city agencies relating to the following production practices?

- YES / NO Extreme overcrowding
- YES / NO Barren tanks unlike their natural habitats
- YES / NO Deprivation of food for several days during transport
- YES / NO Being slaughtered while fully conscious

Additional Comments:

4. Protecting and Coexisting with Urban Wildlife

A. WildlifeNYC

New York City is home to an immense diversity of urban wildlife. Our five boroughs are home to hundreds of species, including geese, deer, squirrels, ducks, raccoons, opossum, coyotes, hawks, eagles, whales, dolphins, seals, turkeys, beavers, bats, pigeons, rats, migratory birds, and so many more. While many animals inhabit New York year round, other species pass through on their annual migrations. The City has initiated a program, WildlifeNYC, aimed to promote awareness, tolerance, coexistence, and understanding of the wild critters we are so fortunate to share our city with.

Will you support funding for the continuation and expansion of New York City's WildlifeNYC program?

YES / NO

Additional Comments:

B. Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation

New Yorkers often come in contact with injured wildlife and have no idea what to do. There is only one brick and mortar wildlife rescue facility in New York City, the Wild Bird Fund. There is no centralized administration of wildlife rescue and rehabilitation, or reliable information for what New York City residents should do when they encounter injured wildlife. Because of the limited information on the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's website, independent volunteer licensed



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rehabilitators are called upon to respond to emergencies and provide care to wild animals in need on a near daily basis. There is much more that New York City can do to support this vital service.

Would you support increased city funding for wildlife rescue and rehabilitation facilities and services?

YES / NO

Would you support establishing city-funded wildlife emergency response units as an alternative to untrained police officers responding to such situations?

YES / NO

Additional Comments:

C. Canada geese in NYC parks

After the 2009 "Miracle on the Hudson", Mayor Bloomberg set forth on a policy of hiring USDA Wildlife Services, a federal agency notorious for inhumane wildlife killing practices, to exterminate Canada geese and goslings in New York City parks. This policy was always wrongheaded. Mayor de Blasio was elected on a promise to pursue alternative non-lethal approaches to Canada goose management. The current administration cancelled the contract with USDA Wildlife Services that compensated USDA to kill geese, instead opting for a non-lethal form of population control known as egg oiling. However, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which leases and controls the city's airports, has continued to contract with USDA to exterminate geese, and Mayor de Blasio has allowed the Port Authority and USDA to access city parks to do so. USDA Wildlife Services has killed hundreds of geese in New York City parks every summer for the past 10 years, decimating the local population. The regional population of Canada geese is significantly reduced and should now be stabilized exclusively through non-lethal management practices going forward.

Will you call for a complete end to killing of Canada geese in New York City parks, and demand that the Port Authority and USDA Wildlife Services pursue exclusively non-lethal methods of wildlife management in areas within the City's jurisdiction?

YES / NO

Additional Comments:

D. Staten Island Deer

In the past decade, white-tailed deer have taken up residence on Staten Island, believed to have swum across from increasingly developed areas of neighboring New Jersey. The City first responded by implementing conflict reduction efforts, including measures like increased traffic signage, a



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reduction of the speed limit, and the inclusion of white-tailed deer in New York City's WildlifeNYC program aimed at educating New Yorkers about coexistence and tolerance with urban wildlife. In May 2016, the City took a bold and unprecedented step of implementing a non-lethal deer management program that sought to stabilize the deer population by performing vasectomies on bucks. Over the past few years, vasectomies have been performed on more than 1,500 bucks that have stabilized and reduced the total deer population and have reduced conflicts caused by their presence.

Despite these encouraging results, some have pushed for a "controlled hunt" of Staten Island's deer. Controlled hunts require killing some number of deer every year, which often leads to a bounce-back effect that ultimately increases the population. In addition to the cruelty involved, annual culls are unlikely to achieve any long-term reduction in the deer population or actually address any of the conflicts associated with their presence.

Will you support continuing the City's deer management program that has successfully stabilized and reduced the population of deer on Staten Island humanely and effectively?

YES / NO

Will you oppose lethal management of deer on Staten Island, including a "controlled hunt"?

YES / NO

Additional Comments:

E. Raccoons

Even though the incidence of rabies has been extremely rare in New York City, with only one human case over the last 50 years, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) requires that any raccoons brought to Animal Care Centers (ACC) be immediately euthanized, regardless whether they are sick or injured or healthy. Every year, hundreds of healthy raccoons are brought into ACC, usually by police officers responding to nuisance complaints, and killed instead of being assessed and potentially released or rehabbed.

Would you join VFAR in calling on the DEC to allow healthy raccoons to be rehabilitated and/or released when suitable?

YES / NO

Would you support establishing alternative protocols for emergency responders such that healthy raccoons are not brought to ACC?

YES / NO

Additional Comments:



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F. Rats

Historically, rat control invariably relies on cruel and imprecise extermination methods - poison bait, glue and snap traps, and more recently dry ice and drowning devices. Needless to say, these methods have failed to achieve lasting impacts on New York's total rodent population for decades (if not centuries). The Department of Health's Rat Academy [public education](#) on nonlethal rat management methods, debuting nearly 10 years ago, has been shown to be effective. [Feral cats](#) are also a potential way to manage rat populations.

Would you support a comprehensive humane rat control program that would be focused on prevention, deterrence and infrastructural improvements?

YES / NO

Additional Comments:

5. Animals Used for Fashion: Fur

Fur farms breed and confine animals in tiny, filthy cages where they suffer intense stress and unimaginable cruelty. They are beaten, bludgeoned, electrocuted, and skinned alive. Trapping animals in the wild is no better — animals are trapped in cruel leg hold traps where they can suffer for days in excruciating pain — starving, until a trapper returns to shoot or bludgeon them to death. Coyotes are known to attempt to chew off their own legs trying to break free. Many other animals are unintentionally caught and killed in these traps, including household pets. California has enacted a ban on the sale of fur. Several countries such as Norway, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Japan, and the U.K. have taken steps to close fur farms, and Israel is on the verge of [banning the entire fur trade](#). With public awareness and innovative alternatives on the rise, many popular designers have stopped using all animal fur. There are ethical alternatives to fur which are not only stylish and warm but environmentally friendly. More info [here](#).

Would you cosponsor and vote for [Intro 1476 \(Johnson\)](#) that would ban the sale of new apparel products using real animal fur?

YES / NO

Additional Comments:



6. Animals Used in Entertainment:

A. Carriage Horses

Advocates have long called out the poor working and living conditions for horses used for NYC carriage rides. Despite common belief, the horses do not live in Central Park, they are forced to travel through NYC traffic to get to and from Central Park. Despite improvements implemented over the years, the horses are often made to work long days - sometimes in extreme weather conditions, and they can go weeks without any opportunity for daily turnout. Over the course of the past three decades, there have been countless incidents and accidents involving New York City carriage horses. As recently as March 2020, a 12-year-old horse named Aisha was euthanized after collapsing in Central Park, a tragic incident that was captured on video camera by a horrified pedestrian. Many horses have died on the streets of NYC or been sent or sold to slaughter once they are unable to continue working. Carriage horse operations have resumed after a temporary hiatus for COVID-19.

Would you cosponsor and vote for legislation to ban horse carriages in New York City?

YES / NO

Would you cosponsor and vote for legislation to enact stronger protections for all working horses in New York City, including a mandatory retirement age and restrictions on sales of exhausted horses to “kill buyers”?

YES / NO

Additional Comments:

B. Rodeos

While New York State has limited the use of animals in circuses and other entertainment, rodeos have been left unregulated despite the display of similar, and in many cases more egregious, acts of cruelty. Rodeos typically include an event called “calf roping” where baby calves are shocked with electric prods, forcing them to run as soon as the holding chute opens, only to be “clotheslined” with a rope and tied at the legs. Panicked calves are routinely injured or killed during these performances. Rodeos also continue to use flank straps or bucking straps, which are tightly fastened around the animal’s abdomen and may be used with sharpened spurs to cause pain to the animal, encouraging them to buck more violently. Rodeos are responsible for causing death or serious injury to countless animals, all for the sole purpose of entertainment and showmanship.

Would you cosponsor and vote for legislation which would prohibit these practices at rodeos?

YES / NO

Additional Comments:



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C. Captive Wildlife, Zoos and Aquariums

The Bronx Zoo currently has two wild-born female Asian elephants, Happy and Patty. Happy, has been confined alone for over fourteen years in a small enclosure that contains a one-acre outdoor yard, barren corrals, and an industrial holding facility. In the winter months, when it's too cold for her to be outside, she is confined to an industrial cement structure that is lined with windowless, barred cages. Happy has been documented engaging in unnatural behavior indicative of distress and suffering. Scientists who are experts in elephant cognition and behavior have attested that the Bronx Zoo cannot meet Happy's biological and psychological needs. There has been a longstanding campaign for the Bronx Zoo to close its elephant exhibit and send Happy to an elephant sanctuary.

Would you join VFAR and other advocates in demanding that the Bronx Zoo close its elephant exhibit and release Happy and Patty to an elephant sanctuary?

YES / NO

Through extensive study and observation, scientists have found that elephants are self-aware, autonomous animals. In other words, they are cognitively, emotionally, and socially complex beings who have the capacity to exercise free will and make choices about how to spend their days and live their lives, just as human beings do. The right to liberty protects an individual's autonomy and ensures that she cannot be imprisoned (held in an environment that deprives her of her autonomy) or exploited (displayed, used for entertainment, or forced to breed).

Would you support legislation that would recognize and protect elephants' right to liberty?

YES / NO

Additional Comments:

CANDIDATE SIGNATURE

11/17/20

DATE