



2022 New York State Senate & Assembly Election 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 2019, VFAR led the successful campaign to prohibit the sale of foie gras in NYC and to stop wild bird poaching. We also led the campaign to end the use of wild animals in circuses in NYC. We look forward to working with you to win more victories for animals and make the state of New York a leader in compassionate public policy.

VFAR's mission is to elect candidates who support animal protection, lobby for stronger laws to stop animal cruelty, and hold elected officials accountable to humane voters. We mobilize public concern for animals through the political process. Animal protection is a moral and bi-partisan issue. More than 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 whom are VFAR volunteers 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 2021 NYC election cycle.

Endorsement Process

Candidates seeking our endorsement for the New York State Assembly and Senate are **required** to fill out this questionnaire and submit to woof@vfar.org.

Endorsement decisions are made by VFAR's Board in collaboration with our all-volunteer election team.



**VOTERS FOR
ANIMAL RIGHTS**

Candidate Contact Information & Campaign Information

Candidate Name Michelle Ostrelich Pronouns She/Her Cell [REDACTED]
Email [REDACTED]

Campaign Manager Luiz Dos Santos Pronouns He/Him Cell Phone [REDACTED]
Email [REDACTED]

District: 44th Senate District

Cities/Towns/Villages/Neighborhoods In Your District: City of Schenectady, Town of Niskayuna, all of Saratoga County

Party: Democrat/WFP

Office Sought: State Senator

Incumbent/Challenger: Jim Tedisco (he is running in a district he doesn't live in, yet)

Name of Campaign Committee: Friends of Michelle Ostrelich for State Senate

Campaign Field Office Address 635 Plank Rd., Clifton Park, NY 12065

Campaign Website michelleforstatesenate.com

Campaign Social Media

<https://www.facebook.com/michelle4nys>

<https://www.instagram.com/michelle4nys/>

<https://twitter.com/michelle4nys>

Occupation/Employer: Schenectady County Legislator

Organizational Affiliations, if any

Endorsements, if any: see attached



Personal Initiatives

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

Yes, setting policy is our job. How we treat animals, companion and wildlife, is indicative of how we treat one another. Setting policy that promotes humane treatment and behavior is essential to our civil society.

2. Do you have any achievements to date on humane issues, 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?

As a Schenectady County Legislator, there hasn't been a lot of opportunity to do work on humane issues. My family has always had a dog and we support our local shelter, the Animal Protective Foundation in Glenville. I was pleased to see that APF once again received a Companion Animal Capital Fund grant to help with capital improvements at the shelter.

3. What animal issues will you prioritize and lead on as a member of the NYS legislature?
 - a. Following the passage of the Puppy Mill Pipeline bill, I will advocate for banning online sales of animals
 - b. Wildlife Killing Contest bill
 - c. Establishing an animal cruelty compensation fund to help ease the burden of caring for abused animals at our state's shelters
 - d. Inclusion of the Companion Animal Capital Fund in next year's budget

4. Will you commit to having a designated person in your office to handle animal issues?

It all has to do with what funds I am allocated. I can assure you, however, that my legislative director will be the person tasked with making sure these issues are overseen.

5. How would you work to empower the animal advocacy community to reach new success and growth into the 2023-2025 term and ensure that New York is on the forefront of animal protection?

I would work hand in hand with the excellent coalition of groups forged by the ASPCA, HSUS and NYSAPF to bring their message to leadership and create more opportunities for legislation. More has been accomplished in the last few years than in the last few decades—we need to keep that momentum going.



PRIORITY LEGISLATION

1. Companion Animals: Pet Stores

Puppy mills are commercial dog-breeding facilities that make money by producing large numbers of puppies as quickly as possible, breeding dogs over and over in cruel conditions. Puppy mills and pet stores have repeatedly been found to have poor sanitation, infectious diseases, overcrowded cages, animals receiving no exercise, proper veterinary care, protection from harsh weather conditions, or adequate food and water. These out-of-state breeders send their puppies into New York via a pipeline of middlemen who ship them to pet stores to be sold to the public. [More info here.](#)

Would you cosponsor and vote for [A.4283/S.1130](#) (Rosenthal/Gianaris), which would end the sale of dogs, cats and rabbits in pet stores and promote adoption of these animals?

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments: I am thankful that the legislation passed both houses this past session and like you, am hopeful the Governor will sign the bill.

2. Protecting New York's Wildlife: Ending Killing Contests

Wildlife killing contests are organized events in which participants compete for cash and prizes for killing the most, heaviest or even smallest animals within a certain time period. These competitive killing events are inhumane, serve no legitimate purpose, and are not a science-based form of wildlife management. They simply glorify and incentivize killing animals. These competitions are considered cruel by many hunters and wildlife management agencies. Eight states, including Vermont, Maryland and Arizona have already prohibited wildlife killing contests.

Would you cosponsor and vote for [A.5746/S.6643](#) (Glick/Kennedy) to end wildlife killing contests in New York State?

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments: I find this practice to be repugnant and will co-sponsor the bill.

LEGISLATION, BUDGET, AND POLICY

3. Funding for Companion Animal Sheltering and Wildlife Rescue

A. Companion Animal Capital Fund



The New York State Animal Protection Federation's 2021 Shelter Capital Needs Survey shows that there are 26 shelters in New York with [capital needs of \\$56.7 million](#). These underfunded animal rescue and sheltering organizations provide vitally needed services and deserve state funding. The failure of New York to fully fund these facilities that serve all New Yorkers demands immediate correction.

Will you support adding \$5 million to the New York Companion Animal Capital Fund in each of the Assembly and Senate budget bills?

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments: The CACF has been a game changer for New York's shelters. The fund is now at \$8M and I would support an increase as long as that is what the Federation and its allies would like.

B. Companion Animal Care Standards Act for Shelters and Rescues

Would you cosponsor and vote for [A.6246-B/S.6870 \(Paulin/Addabbo\)](#) which would recognize and define the full scope of animal sheltering and rescue operations in New York State, and set minimum standards and best practices for animal rescue?

This legislation will:

- Require all personnel to have on-going training on the care of homeless companion animals.
- Require recordkeeping of animals, including their health and behavior.
- Ban dangerous and reckless methods of animal transport.
- Recognize the importance of foster care in animal sheltering, while requiring shelters and rescues to monitor and track all foster providers.
- Require all entities to have a clearly written management structure that defines staff authority, and reporting hierarchy and responsibilities.
- Establish staffing requirements that are sufficient to feed each animal and clean their enclosures.
- Require that the number of animals housed will not exceed the number of humane housing units available and that adequate socialization and exercise be provided.

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments: This bill also passed this session and I am hopeful that the Governor will sign it.

C. Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation

New York is home to an immense diversity of wildlife in need of protection. Currently there are only a few brick and mortar wildlife rehabilitation centers in New York State, such as the Wild Bird Fund in Manhattan. However, no state funding is provided to support wildlife rescue and rehabilitation in New York, so this immense burden falls on a small number of privately-funded centers and self-funded volunteer wildlife rehabilitators.



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Would you support a funding initiative to expand New York State's capacity for wildlife rescue and rehabilitation?

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments:

4. 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 vices where they can suffer for days in excruciating pain — starving until a trapper returns to shoot or bludgeon them to death. Coyotes often try to chew off their own legs to break free. Many other animals are unintentionally caught and killed in these traps, including household companion animals. 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. The US House of Representatives has recently voted in favor of legislation to ban mink farming throughout the US. With public awareness and innovative alternatives on the rise, many popular designers have stopped using 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 [A.703/S.5439](#) (Rosenthal/Brisport), that would ban the sale of new apparel products using real animal fur?

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments:

5. Animal Testing

Animal testing causes unnecessary pain and suffering; it is archaic, environmentally destructive, and falls short of stated aims of ensuring human and consumer safety.

Would you cosponsor and vote for [A.5653/S.4839](#) (Rosenthal/Biaggi) which would prohibit the manufacture or sale of cosmetics tested on animals?

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments: This bill passed this session and I am hopeful the Governor will sign it.

6. Animals Used in Entertainment



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A. Rodeo Cruelty

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 then 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 sharp-ened spurs to cause pain to the animal, which encourages them to buck more violently. Rodeos are responsible for causing death and serious injuries to countless animals for the sole purpose of entertainment and showmanship.

Would you cosponsor and vote for [A.2124 \(Rosenthal\)](#) which would prohibit these practices at rodeos?

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments: I would consider being the Senate sponsor of the bill.

B. Animal Circuses

Circuses that use animals have been widely cited as a source of cruelty and exploitation for animals. Even if the basic levels of care and protection of the federal Animal Welfare Act are met, circuses force wild animals to languish in cages while traveling from performance to performance without ever having the opportunity to exercise natural behaviors. Time after time, [circuses have been exposed for beating and whipping animals](#) tying their limbs together to facilitate training, shocking them to ensure compliance, not providing adequate food, water and shelter, and other forms of cruelty.

Would you cosponsor and vote for [A.5542/S.4840 \(Englebright/Biaggi\)](#) which would prohibit the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation from issuing permits or licenses that would authorize wild animals to appear in circuses?

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments:

C. Carriage Horses

Advocates have long exposed the poor working and living conditions for horses used for NYC carriage rides. Despite some improvements implemented over the years, these horses are still forced to travel through NYC traffic to get to and from Central Park; they work long days - sometimes in extreme weather - with blinders and uncomfortable mouth bits and no opportunity for daily turnout. For the past three decades, there have been countless catastrophic incidents and accidents involving NYC carriage horses, several of which have been



[captured on video](#) by horrified pedestrians. Many carriage horses die on the streets of NYC or are sent to slaughter once they are unable to continue working.

Would you cosponsor and vote for [A.342](#) (Rosenthal) to ban horse carriages in New York City?

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments:

D. Horse Racing

In recent years, attendance at horse racing venues in New York State has sharply declined in part because of the public's increasing disapproval of the cruelty within the industry, the doping scandals, and the high numbers of injuries and deaths. Despite horse racing's diminishing attraction, New York State continues to provide millions of dollars in subsidies each year to prop up the industry. Each year, approximately \$250 million in revenue generated by the state's casino industry is diverted to support the horse racing industry. This revenue would be better spent investing in essential public services statewide, such as providing additional funding to the cash-strapped human services sector, education of public school students, the worker protection fund, as well as economic development in communities where racing occurs. A 2021 Marist poll found that just 9% of New Yorkers support state subsidies of horse racing. As the horse racing industry continues to decline in popularity, it is time to reinvest these subsidies in areas that will truly help New Yorkers.

Would you cosponsor and vote for [A.8468](#) (Rosenthal), which would redirect subsidies for horse racing to education and to the residents of New York, and [A.7745/S.7260](#) (Rosenthal/Salazar) which would end the unfair tax exemptions for the owners of racehorses.

YES / NO: No

Additional Comments: This is one area where we will have to agree to disagree. Horse racing is an economic development driver in my district.

E. Zoos

Psychoactive drugs have been utilized on animals in captivity for a variety of issues. The use of these drugs on animals have obvious negative implications on their behavioral health despite the justifications offered by zookeepers. In June 2021, it was reported that [Johari](#), a female gorilla was dosed with Prozac to facilitate a male gorilla to mate with her.

Would you cosponsor and vote for [A.8177/S.7284](#) (Gonzalez-Rojas/Brisport), also known as Johari's Law, which would prohibit zoos from giving psychoactive drugs to an animal in order to facilitate procreation.

YES / NO: Yes



Additional Comments:

4. 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. Classroom incubation and hatching projects of baby chicks and ducks are cruel and lead to the abandonment and death of countless young birds each year. There are rarely plans for the mother birds once the eggs develop and the cute baby birds mature. The hatching-project birds, first deprived of a mother hen, are then routinely abandoned in city parks where they cannot survive on their own or dumped at already overburdened local animal shelters and rescues filled with unwanted animals. Hatching projects foster the belief that animals are disposable objects when they are living creatures requiring lifetime care and commitment. Educational and compassionate alternatives have been developed by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), HEART, and humane educators. More information can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Would you cosponsor and vote for [A.142](#) (Rosenthal) that would prohibit schools from using eggs, live baby chickens and ducks for classroom projects?

For Senate candidates: Would you introduce or cosponsor a senate version of A.142 that would prohibit schools from using eggs, live baby chickens and ducks for classroom projects?

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments: Yes, I would consider sponsoring the bill after reviewing the issues at hand.

5. Food and Farming Practices

A. Vegan Food in Schools

Would you cosponsor and vote for [A.301/S.1726](#) (Gottfried/Hoylman) which would require schools to offer plant-based food options?

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments: I answer yes to this with a caveat that we can't just throw more requirements at our schools, especially those who don't get enough funding even with foundation aid, without additional funding to help offset these costs.

B. Climate-Friendly Purchasing



The food and agriculture sector accounts for approximately one quarter to one third of global greenhouse gas emissions. Research shows that we will not meet important climate goals without shifting to a more sustainable food and agriculture system. Reducing food waste and shifting procurement to plant-forward foods are high-impact climate solutions that will decrease the state's emissions. Shifting food procurement is also a cost-effective climate strategy. New York has a history of using procurement to reflect our environmental and social values. Under the GreenNY program, the state is committed to environmentally preferable purchasing of electronics and appliances, energy sourcing, transportation equipment, and more.

Would you cosponsor and vote for [A.6241/S.740](#) (Fahy/Biaggi) which would establish a methodology for state agencies to estimate, to the extent practicable, the greenhouse gas emissions that occur through the life cycle of all food and beverages purchased by state agencies, including third-party vendors that provide food on their behalf?

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments:

C. Dairy Subsidies and transition to plant-based suppliers in New York State

Milk and other dairy products are top agricultural products in New York State, but demand for and sales of dairy products in New York and the U.S. have dropped precipitously in recent years, while sales of non-dairy milks have substantially grown. This change comes as more research and information illuminate the harmful effects of dairy on adult and children's health, the environment and animal welfare. Regardless of the quality of individual animal care offered by a given farm, dairy production necessarily involves farmers taking newborn calves from their mothers who bellow and chase after them. Instead of a mother's milk going to her babies, her calves are taken to veal farms where they are kept isolated in row upon row of small plastic huts to prevent movement and soften their muscles into atrophy. Perhaps worst of all, forcibly impregnating, tail docking, and beating downed cows are standard practices on NY dairy farms. Former dairy companies like long-time New York producers like Elmhurst Dairy are making the switch to non-dairy products. New York-based companies are offering healthy plant-based foods, yet every year taxpayers are subsidizing New York's dairies with as much as \$60 million in credits.

Would you support reducing and redirecting the massive financial subsidies that New York provides the dairy industry, and reallocating this to support plant-based local farming initiatives?

YES / NO: Not Sure

Additional Comments: I would need to do more research into this and speak with the dairy farmers in the district before making a commitment.

B. Farming Practices



There are more than [600 factory farms](#) in New York State that intensively confine animals and engage in heinously cruel practices such as castration of pigs, cows, and other mammals without painkillers; “debeaking” or “beak cutting” of chickens and turkeys without painkillers; and confinement of egg-laying hens in battery cages, baby cows in veal crates, and pigs in gestation crates. Factory farms are degrading the environment and poisoning our communities.

There are also [80+ slaughterhouses and live animal markets throughout the five boroughs of NYC](#), more than any other U.S. city. Experts have stated that these facilities in New York are no different than the live animal markets abroad where COVID-19 started. In addition to brutally cruel treatment of the animals (tiny cages, no vet care, severely limited food and water), these storefront facilities pose a significant health and safety hazard to the community and severely impact the neighborhood residents’ quality of life. Blood, feces, urine, dismembered body parts, and feathers are routinely found on public sidewalks and streets. They are also a breeding ground for infectious diseases — avian flu has been found in several NYC live animal markets and many are located close to schools and playgrounds. Additionally, when large animals such as cows, bulls, and goats escape (as routinely happens, including during transport), it puts us all in danger and has even caused a [multi-hour traffic jam on the Verrazano Bridge](#). Sometimes these animals are allowed to be rescued by a farm animal sanctuary but most often they are killed.

Especially in light of pandemics that originate from crowded, unsanitary live animal markets, would you support a permanent ban on the operation of all factory farms? Would you support legislation [A.10399/S.8291](#) (Rosenthal/Sepulveda) that would regulate the operation of live animal markets in New York City?

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments:

Would you cosponsor and vote for legislation to ban confining animals and other cruel practices such as (a) castration of pigs, cows, and other mammals without painkillers, (b) “debeaking” or “beak cutting” of chickens and turkeys without painkillers, (c) confinement of egg-laying hens in battery cages, (d) confinement of baby cows in veal crates, and (e) confinement of pigs in gestation crates?

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments:

Would you cosponsor, support and vote for legislation [S.7592/A.1301](#) (Brisport/Rosenthal) to require that any animal who escapes a slaughterhouse or transport vehicle be released to an animal sanctuary or other rescue, and require the owner of the facility from which the animals escaped to reimburse any associated costs?

YES / NO: Yes

Additional Comments:



8. Legal Rights for Animals

In 2018, in a decision denying a habeas corpus claim brought on behalf of [two chimpanzees kept for decades in small cages inside of a warehouse](#), Justice Eugene M. Fahey of the New York Court of Appeals issued a concurring opinion stating the following:

“To treat a chimpanzee as if he or she had no right to liberty protected by habeas corpus is to regard the chimpanzee as entirely lacking independent worth, as a mere resource for human use, a thing the value of which consists exclusively in its usefulness to others.... While it may be arguable that a chimpanzee is not a “person,” there is no doubt that it is not merely a thing.

Do you believe that animals should have an individual legal right to bodily liberty, and if so, would you support legislation that establishes such a right?

YES / NO: Not sure

Additional Comments: Would need to do more research.

CANDIDATE SIGNATURE

DATE