

February 21, 2025

Re: SB25-038 – Wildlife Damage Protection of Personal Information

Dear Honorable Members of the Agriculture, Water & Natural Resources Committee,

Friends of Animals¹ submits these comments on behalf of our Colorado members to express strong opposition to SB25-038, which seeks to restrict public access to critical information related to wildlife damage claims and proactive nonlethal conflict mitigation measures. This bill raises significant ethical concerns by limiting transparency in how Colorado manages human-wildlife interactions- especially when those decisions impact native species and public resources.

The Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) was enacted to ensure transparency and accountability in government operations, allowing the public to scrutinize how taxpayer funds are allocated and whether government agencies are fulfilling their duties in the public interest, including the protection of wildlife. SB25-038, however, undermines these principles by exempting critical information regarding wildlife damage claims from public disclosure, thereby preventing oversight of how these claims are handled and whether ethical, nonlethal methods are prioritized.

Under existing law, the public has a clear right to access information that affects the use of public resources, including whether taxpayer dollars are being allocated to actions that harm or protect wildlife. Moreover, the public has a vested interest in knowing who is receiving state-funded compensation for alleged wildlife-related losses. When taxpayer dollars are used to reimburse private individuals for depredation claims, full transparency is essential to ensure that these funds are allocated equitably and justifiably. Accountability requires that the names of recipients be publicly accessible to prevent misuse of public resources and to uphold ethical wildlife management standards.

Transparency is critical in verifying that nonlethal methods remain the priority, particularly in managing predator conflicts. Given the timing of this bill—following repeated efforts to undermine Colorado’s wolf reintroduction plan—it is imperative to safeguard public oversight. Without clear disclosure, there is a significant risk that lethal control measures could be improperly employed, further threatening Colorado’s commitment to responsible and science-based wildlife management. By broadly exempting personal information and site assessments related to these claims, SB25-038 creates a legal barrier to transparency that is not warranted by privacy concerns. Decisions impacting the fate of wildlife must be subject to public scrutiny to ensure they

¹ Friends of Animals is a non-profit international advocacy organization incorporated in the state of New York since 1957. Friends of Animals has tens of thousands of members worldwide. Friends of Animals and its members seek to free animals from cruelty and exploitation worldwide and promote a respectful view of non-human, free-living, and domestic animals.

are made in a manner consistent with the public interest, particularly in cases where lethal control measures may be considered.

Further, prohibiting legal challenges to the division's determination of what information has been made public by an individual or their agent sets a dangerous precedent. This restriction could limit judicial oversight and block legitimate legal challenges that ensure government decisions remain fair, impartial, and in the best interests of wildlife and humans alike.

Ethically, SB25-038 prioritizes confidentiality over accountability in managing wildlife-related conflicts. Without public access to detailed data on claims, settlements, and mitigation strategies, there is no meaningful way to evaluate whether Colorado's wildlife policies are fair and effective. While the bill allows for limited nonidentifying information to be disclosed at the county level, this is insufficient to ensure full accountability. Stakeholders, including conservation organizations, wildlife advocates, and the general public, deserve comprehensive and accessible information about how these claims are being managed.

Colorado has made significant strides in prioritizing nonlethal wildlife damage management methods and in protecting the integrity of its ecosystems. This bill threatens to reverse that progress, enabling unchecked decisions that could harm wildlife without public oversight. I urge you to reject SB25-038 and instead advocate for policies that promote the trust of Coloradans and all those who value wildlife, public transparency, stakeholder accountability, and ethical wildlife management. Thank you for your time and consideration. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

/s/Elizabeth Holland

Elizabeth Holland

Philanthropy and Communications Manager

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LCS Committees <committees.lcs.ga@coleg.gov>

Please Vote NO on Colorado Senate Bill 25-038

1 message

Heather Gordon Vasquez <heathergordon2282@gmail.com>

Sat, Feb 22, 2025 at 5:07 AM

To: committees.lcs.ga@coleg.gov, nick.hinrichsen.senate@coleg.gov, rod.pelton.senate@coleg.gov, jessie.danielson.senate@coleg.gov, janice.marchman.senate@coleg.gov, james.coleman.senate@coleg.gov, lindsay.gilchrist.house@coleg.gov

Dear Legislators,

Colorado [Senate Bill 25-038](#) threatens to undermine transparency in our state's wolf management by hiding critical information about taxpayer-funded compensation payments from public view. This bill would exempt personal information of those receiving wolf depredation payments from the Colorado Open Records Act, significantly restricting public oversight of this important program.

While the bill claims to protect rancher privacy, its real effect would be to **shield taxpayer-funded compensation payments from public scrutiny**. This legislation would:

- Block access to information about who receives public funds for wolf depredation claims
- Prevent verification of compensation claims through public records
- Restrict transparency of a taxpayer-funded program
- Set a concerning precedent for limiting public access to government payment information
- This bill directly contradicts the spirit of public transparency that Colorado voters supported when passing Proposition 114. The public has a right to know how their tax dollars are being spent, and this information has proven crucial in other states for ensuring the integrity of wildlife compensation programs.

Please Protect Public Transparency in Colorado's Wolf Compensation Program.

Thanks in advance,

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Heather Vasquez
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House Agriculture, Water & Natural Resources

02/24/2025 01:30 PM

SB25-038 Wildlife Damage Protection of Personal Info

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
Daniel Eastman Against himself	<p>While the bill claims to protect rancher privacy, its real effect would be to shield taxpayer-funded compensation payments from public scrutiny. This legislation would:</p> <p>Block access to information about who receives public funds for wolf depredation claims</p> <p>Prevent verification of compensation claims through public records</p> <p>Restrict transparency of a taxpayer-funded program</p> <p>Set a concerning precedent for limiting public access to government payment information</p> <p>This bill directly contradicts the spirit of public transparency that Colorado voters supported when passing Proposition 114. The public has a right to know how their tax dollars are being spent, and this information has proven crucial in other states for ensuring the integrity of wildlife compensation programs.</p>
Chris Pedone Against himself	<p>Transparency should be key if people are receiving compensation from taxpayers</p>
Diana Keyser Against himself	<p>I strongly oppose SB25-03. Its real effect would be to shield taxpayer-funded compensation payments from public scrutiny.</p> <p>This legislation would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevent verification of compensation claims through public records• Restrict transparency of a taxpayer-funded program• Set a concerning precedent for limiting public access to government payment information• This bill directly contradicts the spirit of public transparency that Colorado voters supported when passing Proposition 114.

	<p>The public has a right to know how their tax dollars are being spent, and this information has proven crucial in other states for ensuring the integrity of wildlife compensation programs.</p>
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