



Testimony of
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Wildlife Conservation Society

New York State Joint Committee on Environmental Conservation

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) regarding the New York State Executive Budget released this past January. While we are pleased to see that Governor Andrew Cuomo has proposed that New York's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) continue to be funded at \$300 million in New York's SFY 18/19 executive budget, we are troubled to see that the Zoos, Botanical Gardens and Aquariums Program (ZBGA), within the EPF, is facing a \$2.5 million reduction.

WCS saves wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature. To achieve our mission, we harness the network and power of our Global Conservation Program in approximately 60 countries and our five New York City-based wildlife parks, including our Bronx Zoo headquarters and New York Aquarium in Brooklyn. Through support like ZBGA, we are able to focus where it matters most—utilizing this expertise to educate New Yorkers about our conservation mission through the zoos and aquarium.

While the New York State Legislature has worked tirelessly to keep ZBGA funding at \$15 million statewide, a cut to the ZBGA line of this magnitude represents a 17% reduction for all our living museums throughout the state. For WCS, this could translate to a loss of over \$830,000 in state operating support next year for the Bronx Zoo and New York Aquarium.

Administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), the ZBGA Program has proven time again its economic and environmental benefits to the entire state. ZBGA-funded living museums are critical networks that inspire and educate millions of students, their teachers, families, and the general public who visit our facilities annually. ZBGA supports the vital care of wildlife and plants at living museums in communities throughout every New York State county, and in turn we protect natural resources, as well as foster future generations of environmental stewards and STEM workers. These special places

throughout the state generate hundreds of millions of dollars each year and are core to stabilizing local economies by providing good paying jobs and supporting local businesses. With a combined attendance of more than 2.3 million visitors annually, the Bronx Zoo and New York Aquarium, are both tourist and family destinations serving diverse audiences in some of the poorest congressional districts in the country. Our living collections help save endangered species, educate and inspire tens of thousands of teachers and children in environmental science, and help us maintain our award-winning programming and interactive educational experiences for diverse constituencies thanks to the support of ZBGA funds. In New York State, the Bronx Zoo and New York Aquarium employ more than 2,800 full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees. Additionally, WCS has more than 695,000 online advocates in New York State representing every State Assembly and Senate district.

Governor Cuomo has shown unprecedented support for New York State's environment, in particular by maintaining EPF funding during a difficult budget year. We respectfully request that this commitment continue and that the legislature maintain the \$300M in the EPF and that they help restore ZBGA back to \$15M.