American Ferret Association

PO Box 554, Frederick, MD 21705-0554 · 1-888-FERRET-1 · afa@ferret.org

POLICY BRIEF: Including Domesticated Ferrets (*Mustela putorius furo*) in H.R. 10522 (The COMPACT Act)

Prepared by: American Ferret Association (AFA) | **Date:** November 2026

Legislative Action Requested: Amend H.R. 10522 (*Companion Animal Protection Against Cruel Testing Act*, 119th Congress) to include domesticated ferrets (*Mustela putorius furo*) alongside dogs and cats across Sections 2 (Definitions), 3 (Funding Prohibition), 4 (Disposition), 11 (Transparency and Annual Reporting), and 12 (GAO Review).

At a Glance

Metric	Key Finding
U.S. Pet Ferret Population	~500,000–1,000,000 animals across ~326,000 households (~0.1%–0.25% of U.S. households; likely underreported)
Annual U.S. Lab Population	10,003 domestic ferrets reported in FY2025 (USDA APHIS) across biomedical and academic research facilities, including 1,240 with pain/distress not minimized
AWA Regulatory Status	Covered under the Animal Welfare Act, but no species-specific housing or care rules (Subpart F general standards only)
Public Data Transparency	Itemized in USDA FY2025 summaries, but omitted from H.R. 10522's HHS annual reporting (Sec. 11) and 3-year GAO veterinary-services review (Sec. 12)
Post-Research Adoption	Permitted under USDA/NIH policy, not federally mandated; routinely omitted from state "Beagle Freedom" laws

1. Companion Animal Standing & Demographic Context

Domesticated ferrets are widely kept, social companion animals, yet their population is systematically undercounted. Because no federal census of pet ferrets exists, estimates rely on household surveys (which carry higher margins of error for species under 1% of households) and pet-supply sales. Ownership is also underreported in jurisdictions with state or municipal bans (such as California, Hawaii, and New York City). Peer-reviewed literature places the U.S. population at ~501,000 (*Animals*, 2022) with credible multi-decade consensus estimates near 1,000,000 (*California Fish and Wildlife Journal*, 2022). Within the broader small-animal category (5–6 million U.S. households per APPA 2025–2026 data), ferrets represent a distinct companion species with specialized welfare needs.

2. Why Ferrets Are Used in Biomedical Research

Ferrets are used strictly for medical and veterinary science, not cosmetic testing, because their physiology bridges the gap between rodents and larger mammals:

- **Respiratory & Infectious Disease (Primary Use):** The gold-standard model for influenza since 1933, and widely used for COVID-19, RSV, cystic fibrosis, COPD, and lung cancer due to natural susceptibility to human respiratory viruses, human-like lung anatomy, and airborne transmission.
- **Neuroscience:** Unlike smooth rodent brains, ferrets have folded cerebral cortices (*gyri* and *sulci*) and postnatal brain development used to study neural wiring and brain/spinal cord injury.
- **Gastrointestinal, Cardiac & Reproductive Biology:** A strong vomiting reflex (absent in rodents) drives use in chemotherapy anti-emetic and *Helicobacter* ulcer studies, alongside cardiac and reproductive research.

3. Federal Oversight, Reporting & Rehoming Gaps

- **No Species-Specific Welfare Rules:** While Title 9 CFR establishes tailored housing, space, and care regulations for dogs, cats, rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, and non-human primates, the USDA has never finalized species-specific rules for ferrets. Under Subpart F ("Other Warm-Blooded Animals"), minimum cage dimensions, enrichment, and social-housing decisions are left largely to individual Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees (IACUCs).
-

- **Pain-Relief & Statutory Oversight Gaps:** USDA APHIS FY2025 annual-report data itemized 10,003 domestic ferrets: 767 held but not used (Column B), 3,807 used with no pain/distress reported (Column C), 4,189 with pain/distress minimized (Column D), and 1,240 where pain/distress was not minimized (Column E). Although peer-reviewed research (*Mrotz et al., 2022*) supports further evaluation of analgesia (buprenorphine) as a welfare refinement in ferret influenza models, ferrets remain excluded from H.R. 10522's HHS annual welfare/rehoming reporting (Section 11) and GAO review of laboratory veterinary services (Section 12).
- **Unfunded Rehoming Burden:** Although USDA Title 9 CFR and NIH Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW) policies permit, and bodies such as FASEB encourage, the adoption of healthy, non-infectious retired research animals, no federal mandate exists. When labs release ferrets, rehoming falls entirely on an informal, under-resourced network of shelters and rescues.

4. Alignment with H.R. 10522 & Federal Modernization

Including domesticated ferrets in H.R. 10522 directly advances the bill's goals and reinforces the September 2026 USDA–HHS joint federal initiative to modernize companion animal oversight under the AWA, expand inspection transparency, and accelerate non-animal, human-based research alternatives. The AFA supports fact-based, veterinary-guided welfare standards and constructive stakeholder collaboration. H.R. 10522's balanced framework of pairing transition certainty and reporting with explicit exemptions for veterinary care, ferret-specific health research, and client-owned clinical studies (Section 2(1)(C)), as well as limited 180-day emergency waiver authority for public health or national security needs (Section 5), offers a practical, durable solution.

References & Regulatory Sources

1. American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). *2026 AVMA Pet Ownership and Demographics Sourcebook*. Schaumburg, IL: AVMA, 2026. *(Data tables available to congressional offices via AVMA Government Relations in Washington, D.C.)*
2. American Pet Products Association (APPA). *2025–2026 APPA National Pet Owners Survey / 2026 State of the Industry Report*. Stamford, CT: APPA, 2026.
3. Whitchurch, K. M., et al. (2022). "Impacts of domesticated ferrets upon wildlife, agriculture, and human health in the USA, compiled from state agency surveys and literature review, with special emphasis upon California." *California Fish and Wildlife Journal*, 108(2).

4. Peer-reviewed U.S. pet ferret population and biomedical model literature hosted via National Institutes of Health / PubMed Central (*Animals*, 2022; NIH/PMC respiratory and AWA regulatory reviews).

5. USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). *FY2025 Research Animal Use Summary* (domestic ferret row); *Animal Welfare Act Regulations (Title 9 CFR, Part 3, Subpart F)*; and *APHIS Form 7023 Annual Report of Research Facility*.

6. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). *Joint Federal Initiative on Companion Animal Oversight*

7. *Modernization and Non-Animal Research Alternatives* (September 2026); NIH Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW) adoption guidance.

8. Mrotz, V., et al. (2022). "Effects of Buprenorphine Treatment on Influenza Pathogenesis in the Ferret (*Mustela putorius furo*)." *Comparative Medicine*, 72(1), 22–29.