

1                   **Sub \_\_\_\_ to 2022 RES-016 [PROPOSED WRIGHT AND PELLEBON]**  
2                   **ESTABLISHING AN INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION OF**  
3                   **THE HENRY VILAS ZOO**  
4

5     The Henry Vilas Zoo is one of Dane County’s most treasured assets and is one of the  
6     very few free zoos left in the United States. It is accredited by the Association of Zoos  
7     and Aquariums, which is the gold standard of accreditation for zoos, and which is  
8     achieved by less than 10 percent of wildlife exhibitors in the United States.

9     On April 17, 2022, the Wisconsin State Journal published an in-depth investigation of  
10    the zoo, alleging racism, retaliation against zoo employees for union activities, animal  
11    neglect, and other allegations.

12    On April 24, 2022, in an editorial titled “Zoo Needs Independent Investigation,” the  
13    Wisconsin State Journal editorial board called for an independent investigation of the  
14    zoo.

15    Under DCO 7.11(7), the county board and its standing committees “shall continually  
16    monitor the performance of departments and agencies in carrying out the policies of  
17    Dane County.”

18  
19    Wis. Stat. 59.51 grants the county board broad authority to “represent the county” and  
20    “have the management of the business and concerns of the county in all cases where  
21    no other provision is made.”

22  
23    The county board is aware that the Department of Administration has conducted an  
24    investigation of Henry Vilas Zoo operations and is working with zoo management to  
25    remedy the issues identified in that investigation. In no way does the county board  
26    question the hard work that has been, and continues to be, applied to that effort by  
27    county staff. However, the county board also finds that the concerns identified by the  
28    Wisconsin State Journal are severe enough that an independent, third-party  
29    investigation is warranted and necessary finds it is necessary to conduct an  
30    independent investigation of the Henry Vilas Zoo in order to restore public confidence  
31    trust in the zoo, ensure that all zoo employees are treated fairly, and to ensure that  
32    animals are being humanely cared for.

33  
34    NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Dane County Board Chair shall select  
35    and appoint a retired Circuit Court Judge as a special investigator to lead an  
36    independent investigation of the zoo.

37  
38    BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the scope of the independent investigation shall  
39    include all issues raised in the Wisconsin State Journal’s report, including but not limited  
40    to:

- 41  
42           • allegations of racism by zoo management  
43           • allegations of retaliation for union activity

- 44 • allegations of retaliation for whistleblowing
- 45 • allegations that employees have been unequally disciplined
- 46 • allegations that animals at the zoo have been neglected or mistreated
- 47 • allegations that zoo employees have left their jobs due to a hostile work
- 48 environment

49  
50 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the special investigator shall issue a written report,  
51 including specific recommendations for reforms at the zoo, and shall appear at a  
52 meeting of the Dane County Public Works and Transportation Committee to discuss the  
53 investigative report and take questions from the committee.

54  
55 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that \$50,000 shall be appropriated from the county  
56 board's program evaluation budget line for the independent investigation.

57  
58 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the retired judge who is appointed to be the special  
59 investigator shall bill their time at the rate of \$200/hour, and the special investigator  
60 shall further be authorized to bill for clerical and other staff assistance and necessary  
61 expenses, not to exceed the \$50,000 total budget for this investigation.

62  
63 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the special investigator shall have use of the county  
64 board's office suite, if needed, during the investigation to conduct meetings and  
65 interviews.

66  
67 BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the independent investigation and written report shall  
68 be completed by no later than October 1, 2022, and shall be presented to a meeting of  
69 the Public Works and Transportation Committee as soon as possible thereafter.