



2024

# ANNUAL REPORT



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# ABOUT US

AEL Advocacy is a public interest law practice and not-for-profit organization operating remotely out of Ontario. We are Canada's first and only intersectional animal and environmental law organization, providing free legal advice and representation to clients in Ontario who would otherwise be unable to afford legal assistance.

## Our Vision

A legal system that recognizes the interdependence of humans, animals, and the environment.

## Our Mission

AEL Advocacy is committed to breaking down barriers to justice for a more compassionate and sustainable society. We focus on three core areas:



### Advocacy

Utilizing our legal expertise to bolster individuals, communities, and organizations striving to safeguard animals and their habitats.



### Education

Raising awareness of animal and environmental law issues through accessible public legal education initiatives and resources.



### Law Reform

Engaging with policymakers, government agencies, and stakeholders to shape progressive laws and policies that protect animals and the environments where they live.

# A LETTER FROM OUR CO-DIRECTORS

Dear friends and supporters,

2024 has been a transformative year for AEL Advocacy, and we are grateful for your unwavering support. Together, we've made significant strides in advancing our mission to protect animals, people, and the planet through legal advocacy, education, and strategic campaigns.

This year, we welcomed two new board members, and added eleven freelance law students to support our Animal and Environmental Law Inquiry Service, all of whom have played a crucial role in our work.

Thanks to generous funding from a LUSH Charity Pot grant, we've been able to bring in over 150 inquiries, providing essential legal guidance to individuals and organizations seeking to make a difference.

This year also marked a milestone in our advocacy efforts: we intervened in our first case at the Federal Court of Appeal, reinforcing our role as a key player in the fight for animal and environmental justice. Additionally, thanks to the generous support of the Pollination Project, we were able to seek leave to intervene at the Ontario Court of Appeal to help ensure the provincial ag-gag laws are not reinstated.

We are deeply grateful for all we've accomplished and excited for what the future holds. With your continued support, we will keep fighting for animals, the environment, and those dedicated to protecting them.

With heartfelt thanks,



**Kira Berkeley**  
Co-Director and Counsel



**Krystal-Anne Rousel**  
Co-Director and Counsel



# HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2024



## **ADVOCATING FOR STRONGER ANIMAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION LAWS**

In 2024, we were active in engaging the public and the government through our advocacy efforts, including:

### **ADVOCATING FOR WILDLIFE IN THE FACE OF HIGHWAY 413**

AEL Advocacy submitted recommendations on Ontario's *Highway 413 Act*, which seeks to fast-track the highway's construction by exempting associated activities from the *Environmental Assessment Act*. Our submission highlighted the devastating implications of this legislation for wildlife, biodiversity, and vital ecosystems. The Act, while purporting to improve efficiency, poses a significant threat to species at risk, wetlands, and conservation areas. We advocated for a more balanced approach, emphasizing sustainable alternatives such as enhancing public transit to minimize environmental harm. We also called for stronger protections for species and their habitats, robust environmental monitoring, and greater transparency.



## **SPEAKING UP FOR ANIMALS IN LABORATORIES**

AEL Advocacy submitted recommendations on the Federal Government's Draft Strategy to Replace, Reduce, and Refine Vertebrate Animal Testing. Our submission highlighted the importance of establishing clear timelines, ensuring transparency, and securing dedicated funding to accelerate the development and implementation of non-animal testing methods. We also stressed the urgent need to support the Canadian Centre for Alternatives to Animal Methods so they can re-open, as their closure earlier this year due to insufficient funding threatens progress in this critical field.

## **PUSHING FOR ANIMALS AND THE ENVIRONMENT TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE 2025 FEDERAL BUDGET**

AEL Advocacy participated in the pre-budget consultations for the 2025 Federal Budget, urging the government to prioritize key initiatives that safeguard health, animals, and the environment. Our recommendations emphasized the importance of advancing a One Health/One Welfare framework across Canada to promote interconnected health and welfare outcomes for humans, animals, and ecosystems. We also called for dedicated funding to phase out toxicity testing on animals by 2035, fostering ethical and innovative scientific practices. Additionally, we advocated for maintaining the designation of all plastic manufactured items as “toxic” under Schedule 1 of the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999* (CEPA), a critical step in reducing plastic waste and protecting health, wildlife, and the environment.



## **WORKING TO PROTECT FUR-BEARING ANIMALS FROM TRAPS**

AEL Advocacy submitted comments on the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's proposal to amend Ontario Regulation 667/98 (Trapping), which involves changing the design specifications of relaxing cable restraints (RCRs) used in trapping. RCRs pose significant animal welfare risks, causing injuries or death to wildlife, pets, and livestock. Malfunctions can result in severe harm, such as abrasions, cuts, and restricted blood flow, with animals suffering even more in extreme weather conditions. We called on the province to withdraw the proposed amendments and prohibit the use of relaxing cable restraints in the province.

## **ADVOCATING FOR ANIMAL INCLUSION IN CANADA'S FRAMEWORK FOR A RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT**

AEL Advocacy submitted comments on the Discussion Document and Draft Implementation Framework for a Right to a Healthy Environment under CEPA. We emphasized that animals are vital to the health and sustainability of ecosystems, and their well-being is essential to environmental protection. Actions that harm or threaten animals can undermine environmental health as a whole. We urged Canada to recognize that the right to a healthy environment should extend to all living beings, acknowledging the inherent rights of animals alongside environmental health.



## **ADDRESSING ENVIRONMENTAL HARMS FROM ANIMAL AGRICULTURE**

AEL Advocacy submitted comments on the Federal Government's draft protocol for Reducing Enteric Methane Emissions from Beef Cattle. While we acknowledged the efforts to address beef cattle emissions, we highlighted that the protocol neglects broader environmental and animal welfare concerns across animal agriculture. It also misses the critical need for a shift away from intensive farming. We urged the government to expand the REME protocol to cover all animal agriculture sectors, include incentives for transitioning to plant-based farming, and invest in plant-based protein and cellular meat technologies, alongside stronger regulations on animal agriculture.



## **ENSURING ALL SPECIES ARE PROTECTED AND RESPECTED**

AEL Advocacy submitted comments in favour of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's proposal to renew the Ontario Invasive Species Strategic Plan. Given Ontario's heightened risk of new species introductions and its status as the province with the highest number of invasive species, our comments stress the necessity for a comprehensive, forward-thinking strategy. We urged the government to reassess its current approach, aligning environmental strategies with urgent climate action and prioritizing animal welfare. As the plan evolves, we advocate for policies that recognize the intrinsic value of all wildlife, fostering a balanced coexistence with nature.





## FIGHTING FOR ENFORCEMENT OF ANIMAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS

### SPEAKING UP FOR TOOTHLESS THE SHARK

AEL Advocacy took action on behalf of Toothless, a Whitetip Reef Shark housed at Big Al's Ottawa, by filing an official complaint with Ontario's Provincial Animal Welfare Services (PAWS). The complaint alleges violations of the *Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act* and calls for an investigation into the inadequate and harmful conditions Toothless has endured.

For approximately six years, Toothless—a 4–5-foot-long shark—has been confined to an 8-foot long tank, a space far too small for him to swim freely or exhibit his natural behaviours. Whitetip Reef Sharks are highly social animals that thrive in groups, yet Toothless lives alone, an unnatural and distressing existence that raises serious welfare concerns. To shed light on Toothless's plight and push for change, we also launched a public awareness campaign that included:

- A Press Release to engage the media and inform the public about Toothless's case: and
- A Public [Petition](#), which has already garnered **861 signatures**, calling on Big Al's to transfer Toothless to a more appropriate environment and to pledge never to keep sharks in captivity again.

Through our efforts, we are working to shine a spotlight on Toothless' situation and drive meaningful change for animals in captivity.

## **PUSHING FOR GREATER TRANSPARENCY IN OUR FOOD SYSTEM**

In our unyielding pursuit of a transparent food system that prioritizes the well-being of animals, people, and the planet, AEL Advocacy made impactful strides:

### **GREEN LAWS, GREY AREAS: A STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL LAW ENFORCEMENT GAPS IN ONTARIO'S ANIMAL AGRICULTURE SECTOR**

AEL Advocacy published a new report, [\*Green Laws, Grey Areas: A Study of Environmental Law Enforcement Gaps in Ontario's Animal Agriculture Sector\*](#), which critically examines Ontario's environmental law enforcement in the animal agriculture sector. Despite existing regulations, the sector remains a major driver of water pollution, habitat destruction, and climate change, while also contributing to animal suffering. The report reveals troubling enforcement gaps and highlights the growing threat of ag-gag laws that restrict public access to farming practices, shielding harmful activities from scrutiny. We are calling on the Ontario government to strengthen enforcement, ensure transparency, and impose meaningful penalties to better protect ecosystems, animals, and communities.





## PROMOTING TRANSPARENCY IN PLANT-BASED FOOD LABELLING

AEL Advocacy provided input on the Federal Government's Proposed Guidance for Labelling Plant-Based Alternatives to Egg Products. We expressed support for the guidelines while advocating for enhancements to ensure clarity and fairness in the marketplace. Our recommendations included:

- Establishing clear definitions of “plant-based” to promote transparency and prevent consumer confusion.
- Standardizing labelling practices to clearly differentiate plant-based products from animal-based counterparts.
- Developing guidelines that empower consumers to make informed choices and foster the growth of the plant-based food sector.



## AEL ADVOCACY IN THE COURTS

### AEL ADVOCACY SEEKS TO INTERVENE IN ONTARIO AG-GAG CASE

AEL Advocacy sought permission to intervene in a pivotal case before the Ontario Court of Appeal, challenging the constitutionality of provisions in the *Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act, 2020*. Often referred to as “ag-gag” laws, this legislation restricts Undercover investigations at farms and slaughterhouses, impeding

efforts to expose animal cruelty and environmental violations. The appeal follows a 2024 ruling striking down key provisions of the legislation for violating freedom of expression under the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. AEL Advocacy sought to argue that these restrictions undermine both animal welfare and environmental accountability, silencing critical voices needed to expose systemic abuses and ecological harms. By intervening, AEL Advocacy sought to uphold transparency as essential for protecting animals, ecosystems, and public health. We are grateful to The Pollination Project for funding this initiative.




## **FIGHTING BIG PLASTIC**

In a milestone achievement, AEL Advocacy intervened in its first case—a pivotal legal battle over Canada’s regulation of plastic products—alongside Animal Justice. The case arose after the Federal Court sided with the "Responsible Plastic Use Coalition," a group of major plastics manufacturers and distributors, overturning the federal government’s decision to designate plastic manufactured items as "toxic" under the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999* (CEPA). This designation was a critical step toward banning single-use plastics and tackling the growing plastic pollution crisis.

In court, AEL Advocacy argued for an interpretation of CEPA that prioritizes protecting wildlife and ecosystems, emphasizing the devastating impact of plastic pollution on animals. Our involvement ensured that the voices of animals were represented in this crucial fight, reinforcing the urgent need for robust measures to reduce plastic waste and safeguard the environment.







**“Human, animal and environmental rights are all connected. From the pig confined on a factory farm, to the local bodies of water that are polluted from that farm, to the activist who is fighting to stop these atrocities; AEL Advocacy ensures that no one is forgotten.”**

- Nives Ilic, President of the Board of Directors, AEL Advocacy



## **ENHANCING ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN ANIMAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL LAW**

At the heart of AEL Advocacy's mission is an unwavering commitment to building a legal landscape that is accessible and just. This dedication drives our work across various initiatives, ensuring individuals, communities, and organizations can navigate complex legal challenges.

### **THE ANIMAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL LAW INQUIRY SERVICE**

AEL Advocacy's free [Animal and Environmental Law Inquiry Service](#) addresses the growing demand for accessible legal support in Ontario. By offering up to two hours of summary legal assistance to inquirers, the service empowers users to tackle a wide range of animal and environmental law issues, including dangerous dog designations, pet custody disputes, land-use planning, and ag-gag laws.



Thanks to a LUSH Charity Pot Grant, we expanded our capacity in 2024, increasing awareness of the service and boosting the number of inquiries we receive each month. The grant also allowed us to engage law students through freelance opportunities, fostering their interest and expertise in this vital field of law.

This year, we answered dozens of inquiries providing countless hours of free advice. These cases included assisting with a complaint to the College of Veterinarians of Ontario, guiding a volunteer rehabilitating injured wildlife through the process of applying for a wildlife custodian license to protect animals under their care, and offering guidance on assessing the grounds for legal action against mandatory euthanasia requirements for veterinary technician programs. Each inquiry underscores the service's vital role in bridging access to justice and addressing critical legal challenges in animal and environmental protection.



## **PROVIDING EDUCATION**

## **ACCESSIBLE**

## **PUBLIC**

## **LEGAL**

At AEL Advocacy, we are dedicated to equipping individuals and organizations with the knowledge and resources needed to understand the law and exercise their legal rights. In 2024, we reached diverse audiences through various platforms to make legal information accessible and actionable.

## **SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS**

This year, we proudly participated in the Canadian Animal Law Conference, where Co-Director Kira Berkeley presented on a panel for



students about careers in animal law. Additionally, our team contributed to panels at the University of Ottawa and the University of Toronto, sharing insights and fostering dialogue on critical legal issues.

## **OUR WEBSITE AND BLOG**

Our website serves as a central hub for accessing our services, exploring our reports and publications, learning about our passionate team, and staying informed about upcoming events. The site also hosts our blog, which offers concise updates on key animal and environmental law issues, providing the public with timely and accessible legal insights.

Visit our blog at: [www.aeladvocacy.ca/blog](http://www.aeladvocacy.ca/blog)

## **NEWSLETTER**

AEL Advocacy's newsletter keeps subscribers informed about pressing animal and environmental law topics. Through updates on law reform campaigns, event promotions, and highlights from our activities, we empower readers to stay engaged with our work.

Subscribe to our newsletter at: [www.aeladvocacy.ca/subscribe](http://www.aeladvocacy.ca/subscribe)





## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

We continued to expand our reach on social media in 2024, growing our audience to 209 followers on Facebook, 319 on LinkedIn, and 449 on Instagram. Our YouTube channel also serves as a resource for past webinar recordings, presentations, and an introductory video showcasing AEL Advocacy's impactful work.

By leveraging these platforms, AEL Advocacy is advancing public legal education, promoting informed action, and fostering a deeper understanding of animal and environmental law.

**Follow us @aeladvocacy**

# TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ANIMAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL LAW LAWYERS

In 2024, AEL Advocacy made significant strides in nurturing future legal professionals dedicated to protecting animals, people, and the planet.

## INTERNS & VOLUNTEERS

With the generous support of a LUSH Charity Pot Grant, we engaged 11 freelance law students to assist with our Animal and Environmental Law Inquiry Service. These students conducted critical legal research, significantly expanding the reach and impact of our services. In addition to helping address diverse legal challenges, this initiative provided aspiring lawyers with invaluable hands-on experience in the fields of animal and environmental law.

## ANIMAL LAW PRACTICUM

This year, we proudly launched Canada's first Animal Law Practicum at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law. Offered as an optional credited component of the Animals and the Law course developed by Professor Angela Fernandez, the Practicum bridges theory and practice, giving students the opportunity to address pressing legal challenges in real-world contexts.





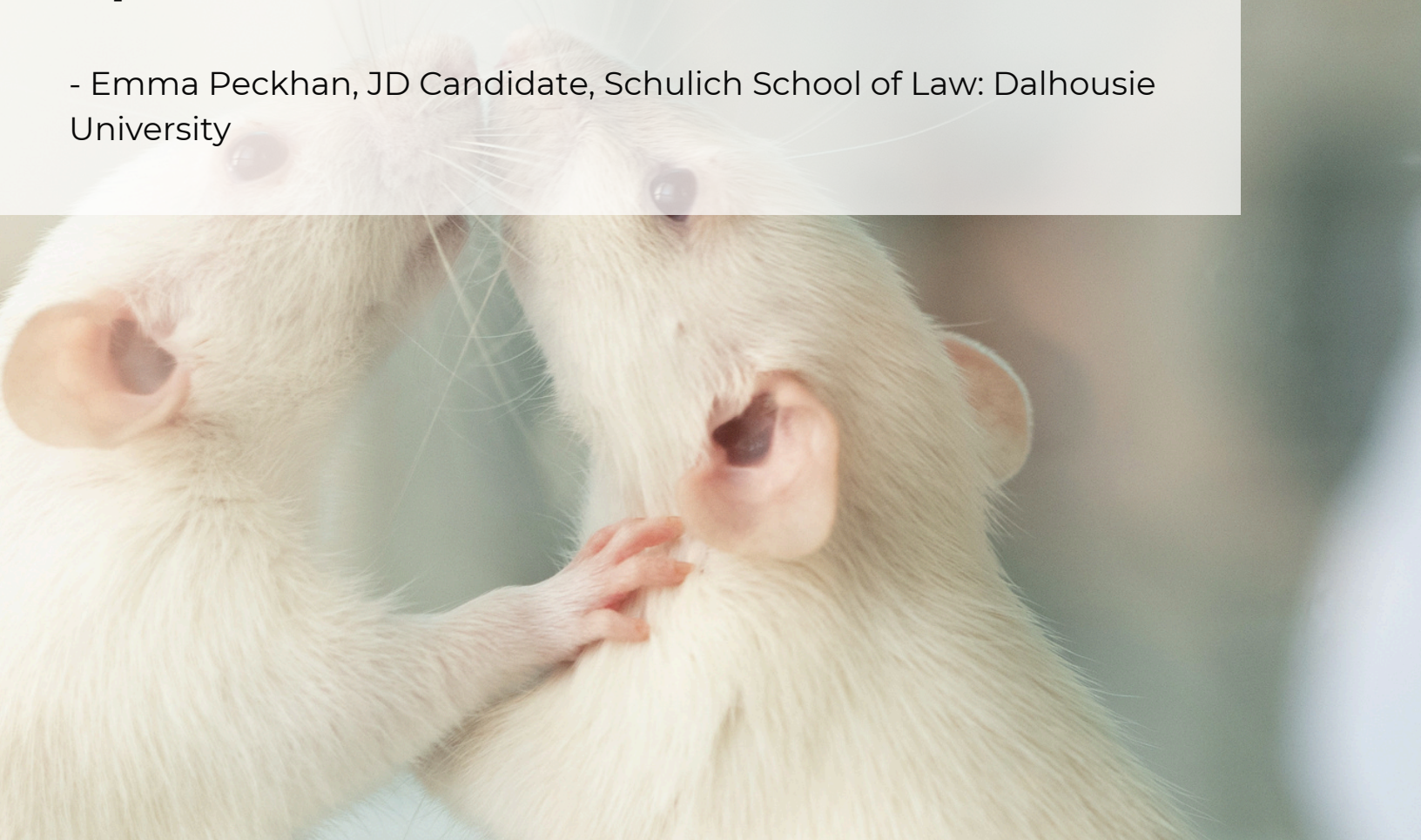
# 2024 FINANCIALS\*

REVENUE	EXPENSES	IN KIND CONTRIBUTIONS
Grants: \$5,163.10 Donations: \$1,677.75	Bank charges: \$69.78 Office Expenses: \$875.29 Subscriptions: \$242.89 Professional Development: \$276.85 Account & Bookkeeping: \$1,986.55 Advertising: \$3,301.17 Travel & Accommodations: \$533.87 Consulting Fees: \$4,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pro Bono Legal Services</li> <li>• Google Workspace Grant</li> <li>• Google Ads Grant</li> <li>• Volunteer Services</li> </ul>
<b>GROSS PROFIT:</b> <b>\$6,840.85</b>	<b>TOTAL EXPENSES:</b> <b>\$11,286.40</b>	<b>TOTAL EQUITY:</b> <b>\$6,446.45</b>

\* These 2024 financials follow our fiscal year (October 1 2023 - September 30, 2024)

**“This past summer, I had the privilege of working for AEL Advocacy as a student-at-law, supported by the Schulich Academic Excellence Internship. This opportunity allowed me to immerse myself in areas of law that are both intellectually challenging and profoundly important to me. My time at AEL Advocacy not only enriched my understanding of the legal profession but also solidified my commitment to pursuing a career in public interest law, where I can advocate for social justice and represent those who lack a voice..”**

- Emma Peckhan, JD Candidate, Schulich School of Law: Dalhousie University



# THANK YOU

AEL Advocacy is deeply grateful for the work of our dedicated staff, Board of Directors and volunteers, and for the financial contributions of our supporters and funders. Each of you plays such an important role in helping us carry out our mission.

## **Co-Directors**

Kira Berkeley  
Krystal-Anne Roussel

## **Board of Directors**

Nives Ilic  
Becky Carpenter

## **AEL Advocates**

Adam Clasky  
Kira Berkeley  
Nives Ilic  
Krystal-Anne Roussel  
Andrew Berkeley  
Brent Huang  
Katherine Clements  
Shannon Nickerson  
Russell Berkeley  
Remi Martini

## **Grant Funders**

LUSH  
Pollination Project  
Animal Welfare Foundation

## **Student Interns**

Emma Peckham  
Taite Palidwar  
Christopher Ma  
Sian Shin

## **Volunteers**

Emma Peckham  
Joseph Kim  
Russell Berkeley  
Tyler Hodgkinson

## **Community Partners**

House of Barons Barbershop  
Little Jo Berry's  
Maverick's Donuts  
Scott Law Group

## **Freelancers**

Kirsten Marsh  
Adam Clasky  
Nada Ibrahim  
Naxi Aze  
Samuel Gruppuso  
Mari Lehoux  
Ana Featherston-Rajcic  
Oscar Li  
Mark Snyder Jr.  
Laura Casciaro  
Clare Henderson  
Olena Stevenson

**We Still Need You.**

**Become a monthly donor**

Your donation will help us secure legal protections for animals and the environments where they live. Learn more at [aeladvocacy.ca/donate](https://aeladvocacy.ca/donate)





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