



Smithsonian
National Zoological Park
Conservation Biology Institute

Office of the Director

January 11, 2023

Dear Congresswoman Holmes Norton,

Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute is committed to the safety and security of our guests, staff, and animals. As part of our COVID response, we learned the value visitor passes can bring to our Zoo and local community as they enable us to observe and manage visitor capacity, reduce local traffic congestion and most importantly, provide for an overall better and safer visit to the Zoo. We have also learned and applied best practices from other Smithsonian units who successfully use passes as part of their entry experience.

By acquiring free passes online in advance of a visit, the Zoo is better prepared to address visitors' needs and volume. Advance knowledge of our attendance allows us to plan for the most efficient and responsible park operations, especially for staffing and providing guest amenities. We take visitor accessibility very seriously and have a process to accommodate guests who want to visit the Zoo but are unable to use or access technology.

Visitors who arrive at the Zoo without advance passes can acquire them through their mobile devices the day of their visit. Guest relations staff are at both pedestrian entrances to assist anyone who may have difficulty operating a mobile device or to admit visitors who cannot reserve passes online. Thus far, we have had minimal issues or concerns raised by visitors about free passes on a day of visit.

In response to your feedback, we have changed the language on our website to better explain the availability of same-day passes and assistance for guests who cannot access the online system. We will continue to monitor the system and will always strive to find ways to improve safety and security while still providing an excellent visitor experience.

Regards,

Brandie Smith
John and Adrienne Mars Director
Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute