



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT:** Brian Fulton (615) 780-3327  
[Brian.Fulton@dvl.com](mailto:Brian.Fulton@dvl.com)

**THE ELEPHANT SANCTUARY IN TENNESSEE FILES  
RESPONSE TO LAWSUIT BY FORMER CEO**

HOHENWALD, Tenn., Feb. 14, 2011--The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee has asked a court to dismiss a wrongful termination lawsuit brought by co-founder and former CEO Carol Buckley. The Sanctuary's response discloses that in the months leading up to her suspension and dismissal, Ms. Buckley created what workers described as a toxic work environment in which she had explosive outbursts of anger, mistreated staff, damaged employee work records to deprive them of deserved benefits, neglected worker safety concerns and mischaracterized the presence of an active tuberculosis report in the Sanctuary's elephant herd.

In a detailed response and counterclaim with numerous exhibits filed in Chancery Court in Lewis County, the Sanctuary has disclosed that contrary to Ms. Buckley's allegations, it was Ms. Buckley's own failure as CEO to implement infection control procedures agreed to with regulators that preceded several elephant caregivers testing positive for tuberculosis in July 2009.

In September 2009 when Sanctuary co-founder Scott Blais announced he intended to resign due to Ms. Buckley's conduct, the response says, "the (Sanctuary) Board of Directors started to discover the numerous and critical other issues and problems" caused by Ms. Buckley involving "the safety, health and psychological well being of Sanctuary caregivers and employees, many of those threatening, if not immediately addressed by the Sanctuary, to put it at risk."

At that point late in 2009, the Board suspended Ms. Buckley, persuaded co-founder and director of operations Scott Blais to remain in the Sanctuary's employment, engaged an interim CEO, and conducted the investigation that led ultimately to Ms. Buckley's termination despite the Board's exhaustive efforts to create a position for Ms. Buckley that would help the Sanctuary. Those efforts were rejected by Ms. Buckley.

Ms. Buckley, whose employment was terminated March 17, 2010, filed a lawsuit in October against the Sanctuary and its chairman, Ms. Janice Zeitlin, as well as its interim chief executive officer, Ms. Mary Baker.

As to Ms. Buckley's claim of "illegal payments" to the spouse of a board member, the response notes that the selection of the vendor for a building project and payments all were handled according to established policies, disclosed in a yearend audit report, and that Ms. Buckley, along with a board committee and the Sanctuary treasurer, actively participated in and openly supported the project and approved all of such expenditures.



On the matter of “visitation” rights for Ms. Buckley to see Tarra, the 36-year-old elephant Ms. Buckley and co-founder Scott Blais brought to the Sanctuary when it was founded in 1995, the response notes that the Sanctuary made multiple offers that did and would have permitted contact by her with Tarra—but all were ultimately rejected by Ms. Buckley. The Sanctuary response to the lawsuit rejected Ms. Buckley's claim of ownership of Tarra, noting it has been the Sanctuary staff and donors' contributions providing care for the elephant since 1995, not Ms. Buckley.

The response rejects Ms. Buckley's claim of defamation, noting that the defendants "took great pains to describe Plaintiff's leave of absence and departure from the Sanctuary in the most favorable terms to protect the privacy of the Plaintiff, as well as the interests of the Sanctuary and its elephants." And were it not for the need to respond with the truth to the inaccurate allegations of the lawsuit, the response notes, the Sanctuary even now "would not have said anything about her."

The Sanctuary's full documented legal response to the lawsuit is now public record, as was Ms Buckley's lawsuit that initiated it. In answer to requests from the Sanctuary's supporters for information, our response is posted on our website at <http://www.elephants.com/newsStory.php?newsID=1292>.

The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee ([www.elephants.com](http://www.elephants.com)) is a not-for-profit founded in 1995. Since then, it has provided sanctuary to 24 elephants and garnered support from more than 75,000 individuals and organizations. The organization, accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries and licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, is designed specifically for old, sick or needy elephants that have been removed from zoos and circuses. The Sanctuary operates on 2,700 acres in Hohenwald, Tenn., about 85 miles southwest of Nashville, and currently has 14 elephant residents.

###