

*The Nation's First
Elephant Sanctuary*



PAWS
PERFORMING ANIMAL
WELFARE SOCIETY

Founded in 1984
PROTECTION
EDUCATION
ADVOCACY
SANCTUARY
pawsweb.org



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February 12, 2024

Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller State Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Support for SB 0547, Wildlife - Traveling Animal Acts - Prohibition

To Chair Brian Feldman, Vice Chair Cheryl Kagan, and Committee Members:

On behalf of the Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) – which directly cares for elephants, tigers, monkeys, and other wildlife – I strongly urge your support for Senate Bill 0547 to prohibit the use of certain wild animals in traveling shows.

Since 1984, PAWS has been rescuing and providing sanctuary for abused, neglected, and retired captive wildlife. We currently provide refuge for elephants, tigers, bears, monkeys, and other wild animals at our 2,300-acre ARK 2000 sanctuary in Northern California.

To enhance the quality of life for our animals, PAWS provides spacious and environmentally complex areas, with shady trees, native vegetation, pools and lakes. These settings offer more autonomy and control – elements essential to animal welfare – and promote natural behaviors. The animals have social partners where appropriate, and we provide individualized husbandry and veterinary care. PAWS exclusively uses a reward-based animal management method, fostering cooperation and trust.

By their very nature, it is impossible for traveling shows to provide a good quality of life for wild animals. The problems are many: grueling travel from city to city, intensive confinement in cramped cages and transport vehicles, abusive training methods, sterile environments, and inappropriate social groupings. There is absolutely no element of choice for the animals.

During our 40 years of operation we have cared for animals from traveling shows, and we have seen, firsthand, the effects on them:

- Fear of punishment was clearly evident in elephants when they first arrived at the sanctuary. One 10,000-pound male Asian elephant would recoil if you moved your hand too quickly, expecting to be hit.

It is well documented that handlers in traveling shows employ harmful methods to train and manage wild animals, including the use of whips, rods, elephant bullhooks, and electric shock devices.

- Lions were hyper-aggressive, as compared to those from other backgrounds. We attributed this behavior to the long-term stress of travel, intensive confinement, inhumane training, and exposure to noisy crowds.

Unnatural conditions for animals in traveling shows contribute to serious physical and psychological problems.

- Elephants stand for hours on hard surfaces and are immobilized in chains. Lack of movement and standing on unyielding surfaces cause foot and musculoskeletal disorders that can be fatal to them. Strenuous tricks such as sitting or standing upright degenerate the joints, causing years of pain and premature death.
- Big cats frequently suffer foot disorders and may become obese, compromising their health and welfare.
- Abnormal repetitive behaviors (e.g., pacing, rocking, bar biting, and head bobbing) are ubiquitous in traveling shows and evident in various species, including elephants, big cats, and nonhuman primates. These behaviors are widely recognized as a sign of poor welfare.

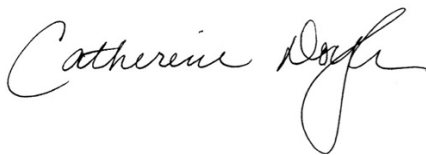
The wild animals displayed in traveling shows are not domesticated. Even those born in captivity retain their natural instincts, which they may act on when threatened or frightened, or sometimes with no warning at all. These animals are already under the immense stress of intensive confinement, harsh training, and the continual presence of spectators. Altogether, this makes them unpredictable and dangerous – and a serious threat to the public and first responders.

Nevertheless, dangerous wild animals are frequently exhibited in unsafe conditions, close to the public. There are numerous accounts of incidents concerning elephants, nonhuman primates, and big cats. These animals have been involved in escapes, attacks, caused injuries and fatalities among trainers, harm to members of the public, and property damage.

Animal acts lack both conservation and education value. Instead, they misrepresent wild animals and undermine public awareness of their imperiled status in the wild. Studies indicate that the presentation of wild animals for entertainment hinders genuine conservation initiatives. This is troubling because traveling shows often showcase endangered species such as Asian elephants and tigers.

Public attitudes toward the use of wild animals in traveling shows have changed, making this the right time for Maryland to join the seven other states that now prohibit certain wild species in circuses and traveling shows. I strongly urge you to support this important measure to protect the public and the animals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Catherine Doyle". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Catherine Doyle, M.S.
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