



February 12, 2024

House Environment and Transportation Committee

HB379

Wildlife - Traveling Animal Acts - Prohibition

FAVORABLE

World Animal Protection, on behalf of our Maryland supporters, strongly supports HB379 which would prohibit the use of bears, elephants, cougars, jaguars, leopards, lions, tigers, and nonhuman primates in traveling acts.

### Animals in Traveling Acts Suffer

Animals used in circuses and traveling acts are deprived of the ability to engage in their natural behaviors, resulting in severe physical and psychological suffering. Wild animals are typically held in small, barren cages without appropriate enrichment or socialization with other members of their species. Animals are forced to sleep, defecate, and eat in the same small space. Decades of research has documented that wild animals living in captivity experience osteoarthritis, obesity, and dental problems. Recent research indicates that the prolonged stress of captivity results in actual physical changes in brain structure and function.<sup>1</sup> As a result, wild animals frequently display stereotypes—repetitive, purposeless behaviors or sounds such as pacing, head bobbing, licking of non-food objects, and gnawing on bars.

By their nature, traveling acts require animals to be transported for long distances throughout the year. Animals are sometimes transported without climate control and subjected to extreme hot and cold temperatures that they would never experience in the wild. Further, “trainers” coerce wild animals to perform unnatural tricks and stunts through abusive methods including physical violence, sedation, restraints, and the withholding of food.

### Wild Animal Acts Jeopardize Public Safety

Traveling acts and circuses that use animals also pose serious risks to public health and safety. Wild animals are unpredictable and difficult to safely constrain, particularly for traveling shows that rely on collapsible and portable equipment. Year after year, captive wild animals injure and even kill members of the public, traveling act employees, and law enforcement officials. For example, in 2016, an animal trainer was attacked and dragged by a tiger in front of a school field trip at the Pensacola Interstate Fair in Florida.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bob Jacobs. [The neural cruelty of captivity: Keeping large mammals in zoos and aquariums damages their brains](#). The Conversation, September 24, 2020.

<sup>2</sup>Troy Moon. [Fair tiger show canceled after trainer injured](#). Pensacola News Journal, October 25, 2016.



Wild animals in captivity are also a zoonotic disease risk. Species such as nonhuman primates can spread deadly infections to humans including tuberculosis, Herpes B, and campylobacteriosis. Elephants can spread tuberculosis, and humans have tested positive for tuberculosis after interacting with infected captive elephants. In 2015, the Dallas County Health and Human Services Department barred two elephants with the UniverSoul Circus from entering after the elephants were exposed to the extremely contagious virus.<sup>3</sup>

### **Lack of Meaningful Federal Regulation**

Action at the state level is urgently needed. The federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA), which regulates wild animal exhibitors such as zoos and circuses, sets out minimal requirements for animal care and is chronically underenforced. Notably, the AWA permits painful “training” methods such as bullhooks (fire poker-like devices used to jab elephants in the most sensitive parts of their bodies), whips, and electrical shocks.

Wild animals in traveling acts spend most of their days in tiny cages, hauled from city to city where they’re forced to perform unnatural—and even painful—tricks and stunts. We urge the passage of HB379 to protect wild animals from cruelty as well as further public safety in Maryland.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Wilonsky. [TB or not TB: Judge sides with Dallas officials banning circus elephants over health concerns](#). The Dallas Morning News, August 19, 2015.