

MD HB53.pdf

Uploaded by: Amanda Gray

Position: FAV



February 3, 2026

Chair Bartlett
Vice Chair Davis
Judiciary Committee
Room 100 - 101
Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: HB53 (Criminal Law – Nondomesticated Animal Prohibitions – Alterations)
Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

The North American Primate Sanctuary Alliance (NAPSA) is a coalition of eight of the leading primate sanctuaries on the continent. Amongst its other functions, NAPSA serves as a central point of contact and expertise for issues relating to captive primates. NAPSA member sanctuaries collectively provide exceptional care to close to 800 nonhuman primates retired from laboratory research, private ownership, and the entertainment industry. Each full member sanctuary is licensed and inspected by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) or its Canadian equivalent, licensed by relevant state and county authorities, and accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries.

We write to you today in support of HB53, as it would remove an existing exemption for “service monkeys” from Maryland’s Nondomesticated Animal Prohibitions. While the relationship between a disabled human and a service monkey may appear mutually beneficial on the surface, the monkeys used in this industry experience compromised health and welfare. In addition to painful training methods utilized in an attempt to control these naturally independent and inquisitive wild animals, they are often subjected to total teeth extraction for “ease of handling,” which drastically limits the foods they can eat and often leads to malnutrition. Monkeys require daily mental stimulation and extensive physical activity, which is impossible for even an able-bodied person to provide. Primates kept in human homes are rarely monitored by animal welfare officials and adequate veterinary care for primates is difficult to find. Once primates reach adolescence, they become unmanageable. They have strong jaws, and bites – even from toothless monkeys – result in painful injuries to humans.

Many public and private organizations have denounced the use of monkeys as service animals. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Justice ruled that monkeys are not service animals under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs does not fund service monkeys for veterans. The American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals also oppose primates as service animals. We strongly urge your Committee to make the right choice and encourage increased public safety, higher standards of animal welfare, and a commitment to end this practice so that captive animals may lead more species-appropriate lives.

We urge Maryland to vote YES on HB53.

Sincerely,

Amanda Gray, Director

NAPSA is a fiscally sponsored project of Community Initiatives, an Oakland, CA-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.
1000 Broadway • Suite 480 • Oakland, CA 94607

Visit our website at www.PrimateSanctuaries.org

HB53 IDA testimony (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Courtney Scott

Position: FAV



January 30, 2026

Re: HB53
End private ownership of zebras and macropods in Maryland

Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of In Defense of Animals, an international animal rights organization, I am writing in support of HB53, which expands the list of dangerous wild animals prohibited from being held by private owners in Maryland. Maryland's exemplary law already prohibits private ownership of big cats, bears, some venomous snakes, and nonhuman primates. It is now critical to include zebras, wallabies, and kangaroos, and wallaroos to protect both the animals and the public. There is a history of zebras and kangaroos attacking their owners, and even children who visit the private facilities, resulting in serious injury and even death. These are large, muscular animals that have often escaped their enclosures, risking more danger to the general public

These animals suffer greatly from the conditions of their captivity, which include poor nutrition, injury and vulnerability to contagious diseases. And like all wild animals, they require vastly more space than small, private facilities can provide. Baby kangaroos stay with their mothers until 1 and a half years old. When they are removed from their mother at a younger age, they endure trauma that lasts a lifetime.

I urge you to pass HB53, making the current prohibition on private ownership of wild, dangerous animals more robust and inclusive and offering more protection for the animals and the citizens of Maryland.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Courtney Scott
Elephant Consultant
In Defense of Animals (IDA)
503-288-6142

HB 53 Written Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: DeEtte Hillman

Position: FAV

HB 53: Written Testimony Regarding a Zebra Welfare Investigation in Maryland

My name is DeEtte Hillman. I am submitting this testimony in my personal capacity, informed by my professional experience in equine rescue and animal welfare.

In late 2021, I was contacted by the Chief of Prince George's County Animal Control regarding an active welfare investigation involving privately owned zebras in the State of Maryland. During that call, I was asked whether Days End Farm Horse Rescue had the ability to assist with transporting the zebras, providing temporary housing at our facility, and coordinating appropriate veterinary care.

This experience demonstrates that, when zebra welfare concerns arise in Maryland, county animal law enforcement agencies may need to seek assistance outside their normal operational scope, including from nonprofit organizations not specifically intended to manage such species. The call reflected a real-world situation in which local authorities required additional resources and expertise to respond to a zebra welfare concern.

I am submitting this testimony to document that such a situation occurred and that a Maryland county animal control agency sought external assistance in connection with the welfare of privately owned zebras.

Respectfully submitted,

DeEtte Hillman
Woodbine, Maryland

The views expressed in this testimony are my own and do not represent the official position of my employer.

HB 53 Testimony_Born Free USA_Devan Schowe_2026.pd

Uploaded by: Devan Schowe

Position: FAV

Written Testimony Submission in Favor of HB 53

Born Free USA

Devan Schowe

Devan@bornfreeusa.org

2/2/2026

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of Born Free USA, a global wildlife conservation and animal welfare organization with expertise on legislation that promotes human public health and safety and protects wild animals from exploitation, I write to you today in favor of passing HB 53. It is crucial that Maryland adds zebras, kangaroos, wallabies, and wallaroos to the state's existing list of dangerous wild animals that are prohibited for trade, breeding, and possession.

According to Born Free USA's Exotic Animals Incidents Database, which offers evidence of potentially dangerous incidents with wild animals in captivity, 96 human deaths occurred from 1990-2025 and 685 human injuries occurred from 1990-2025 due to escapes or attacks involving wild animals. These attacks have occurred irrespective of animal species, size, age, background, habituation to humans, within or outside of an enclosure, and with or without the humans involved having previous wildlife handling experience, including zookeepers, veterinarians, animal trainers, and exotic pet owners. These figures are also likely severe underestimates, as our database only includes those incidents reported in the public domain.

Further, we collected almost 200 incidents with zebras, kangaroos, wallabies, and wallaroos over the last few years. We noticed an uptick in dangerous incidents directly involving these species recently (particularly with kangaroos and wallabies), including animal escapes and attacks on humans, which may require intervention from first responders like police officers, firefighters, and paramedics to resolve.

First responders are not usually trained on how to handle wild animals. Consequently, these incidents put first responders in danger while depleting taxpayer resources to combat immediate threats that could put lives in danger. Examples of just some of these time consuming and risky mitigating strategies include shutting down major roads to corral loose animals, take any action needed (e.g., lethal force) to protect human lives and stop potentially dangerous animals, and track down permits to investigate the legality of wild animal ownership in various states.

Relevant incidents have included kangaroos escaping an exotic animal farm in 2024 and running into oncoming traffic, only to be fatally struck by a vehicle in Amarillo, Texas; an eleven-year-old boy suffering several scratches and at least one bite from a pet kangaroo in

San Antonio, Texas in 2025; and a 56-year-old zoo employee found dead in a kangaroo and wallaby enclosure in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in 2025, after allegedly “rough-housing” with the animals.

Zoonoses, or diseases that may be transferred from animals to humans, also pose a major health concern. There are more than 200 known types of zoonoses, which comprise a large percentage of new and existing diseases in humans. Zoonoses can spread to humans through direct contact or through food, water, or the environment.

By allowing the keeping of wild animals, the state of Maryland is endangering public health and safety and potentially sacrificing the lives of animals should one of them escape or initiate an attack. Despite common beliefs, wild animals retain their natural instincts and remain unpredictable; even when kept and bred in captivity for their entire lives. The poor welfare and high stress level we often see wild animals endure in private possession further enhances the chances of aggressive outbursts.

On behalf of our expert organization and thousands of supporters across the U.S., I implore you to pass HB 53 to preserve human public health and safety and alleviate the suffering of wild animals that are not evolved to cope with the limitations present in captivity to prevent future tragedies (both human and animal) from occurring on your watch.

HB 53 Testimony_Born Free USA_Devan Schowe_2026.pd

Uploaded by: Devan Schowe

Position: FAV

Written Testimony Submission in Favor (FAV) of HB 53

Devan Schowe

Born Free USA

8737 Colesville Road Ste #305

Silver Spring, MD 20910

Devan@bornfreeusa.org

302-757-0973

2/3/2026

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of Born Free USA, a global wildlife conservation and animal welfare organization with expertise on legislation that promotes human public health and safety and protects wild animals from exploitation, I write to you today in favor of passing HB 53. It is crucial that Maryland adds zebras, kangaroos, wallabies, and wallaroos to the state's existing list of dangerous wild animals that are prohibited for trade, breeding, and possession.

According to Born Free USA's Exotic Animals Incidents Database, which offers evidence of potentially dangerous incidents with wild animals in captivity, 96 human deaths occurred from 1990-2025 and 685 human injuries occurred from 1990-2025 due to escapes or attacks involving wild animals. These attacks have occurred irrespective of animal species, size, age, background, habituation to humans, within or outside of an enclosure, and with or without the humans involved having previous wildlife handling experience, including zookeepers, veterinarians, animal trainers, and exotic pet owners. These figures are also likely severe underestimates, as our database only includes those incidents reported in the public domain.

Further, we collected almost 200 incidents with zebras, kangaroos, wallabies, and wallaroos over the last few years. We noticed an uptick in dangerous incidents directly involving these species recently (particularly with kangaroos and wallabies), including animal escapes and attacks on humans, which may require intervention from first responders like police officers, firefighters, and paramedics to resolve.

First responders are not usually trained on how to handle wild animals. Consequently, these incidents put first responders in danger while depleting taxpayer resources to combat immediate threats that could put lives in danger. Examples of just some of these time consuming and risky mitigating strategies include shutting down major roads to corral loose animals, take any action needed (e.g., lethal force) to protect human lives and stop potentially dangerous animals, and track down permits to investigate the legality of wild animal ownership in various states.

Relevant incidents have included kangaroos escaping an exotic animal farm in 2024 and running into oncoming traffic, only to be fatally struck by a vehicle in Amarillo, Texas; an eleven-year-old boy suffering several scratches and at least one bite from a pet kangaroo in San Antonio, Texas in 2025; and a 56-year-old zoo employee found dead in a kangaroo and wallaby enclosure in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in 2025, after allegedly “rough-housing” with the animals.

Zoonoses, or diseases that may be transferred from animals to humans, also pose a major health concern. There are more than 200 known types of zoonoses, which comprise a large percentage of new and existing diseases in humans. Zoonoses can spread to humans through direct contact or through food, water, or the environment.

By allowing the keeping of wild animals, the state of Maryland is endangering public health and safety and potentially sacrificing the lives of animals should one of them escape or initiate an attack. Despite common beliefs, wild animals retain their natural instincts and remain unpredictable; even when kept and bred in captivity for their entire lives. The poor welfare and high stress level we often see wild animals endure in private possession further enhances the chances of aggressive outbursts.

On behalf of our expert organization and thousands of supporters across the U.S., I implore you to pass HB 53 to preserve human public health and safety and alleviate the suffering of wild animals that are not evolved to cope with the limitations present in captivity to prevent future tragedies (both human and animal) from occurring on your watch.

MD HB53_AWI Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Kate Dylewsky

Position: FAV



Animal Welfare Institute

1951–2026 • Celebrating 75 Years

900 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE SE • WASHINGTON, DC 20003
202-337-2332 • AWIONLINE.ORG

February 3, 2026

House Judiciary Committee
Maryland General Assembly
101 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Support for HB 53

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute, a national nonprofit animal advocacy organization with thousands of members and supporters in Maryland, I respectfully urge you to support HB 53. This bill would prohibit the private possession of zebras and macropods, including kangaroos, wallaroos, and wallabies. It would have no impact on exhibitors, including zoos, and current private owners would be grandfathered in and simply required to register their animals. This registration requirement is designed to ensure that first responders and animal control officers are aware of the presence of these wild animals in their communities. The bill would also remove an outdated exemption for “helper monkeys.”

HB 53 builds upon Maryland’s current prohibition on the private ownership of several wild animals, including bears, nonhuman primates, wild cats, and certain venomous snakes, due to public safety risks—strengthening Maryland’s commonsense restrictions and proactive stance on wild animals as pets. A ban on the private possession of these wild animals is in the best interest of the community, first responders, and the animals themselves.

Public Safety

Keeping wild animals as pets endangers both the owners and others in the community. Unlike domesticated equine species, zebras are non-domesticated animals who exhibit unpredictable behavior such as biting, kicking, rearing, and striking with their forelegs. They are strong, muscular, and capable of overpowering people. News reports have documented privately owned zebras seriously injuring their owners and others. For instance, in 2021, a zebra being kept as a pet in Ohio bit his owner’s arm so badly that it almost needed to be amputated.¹ In 2015, a pet zebra in Arkansas mauled the adult son of his owner.²

Zebras also pose a threat to the community when they escape their enclosures. For example, in August of 2021, several zebras escaped from the property of Jerry Lee Holly, a

¹ Available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ohio-zebra-attack-farm-rcna74911>

² Available at: <https://www.kark.com/news/family-owned-zebra-attacks-white-county-district-judge/>

breeder and trader of exotic animals in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.³ Two of the zebras evaded capture for four months, posing a danger to the public as they wandered near residential homes and across public roads and railways. A third zebra was found dead in an illegal snare trap a month later. A fourth zebra, who had not escaped, was found dead on the breeder's property. In response to these incidents, the breeder was charged with three counts of animal cruelty, but was ultimately acquitted of these charges.⁴

Kangaroos, wallaroos, and wallabies also pose a serious public safety risk. These large, powerful animals are prone to attack when they feel trapped or threatened, and escapes occur easily because they can jump over almost any fence. They can physically overpower people and are capable of killing people, with some kangaroos standing as high as seven feet tall. Kangaroos kept as pets and in captivity have been documented biting and injuring children and attacking their owners.⁵ When on the loose, they are a threat to the public, pets, and native wildlife.

Animal Welfare

Keeping wild animals as pets is detrimental to the animals themselves. Human homes cannot meet their physical and social needs. In addition, veterinarians at most pet clinics are not trained or practiced in their care. Without proper veterinary care, animals are left vulnerable to stress, captivity-related diseases, and other complex medical issues, potentially leading to suffering and premature death.

In the wild, zebras form large social herds consisting of several hundred individuals and migrate hundreds of miles annually. They form close bonds with their family groups.⁶ As pets, they often suffer from boredom and stress imposed by their captivity that can exacerbate aggressive behavior.⁷ In the U.S., zebras can carry diseases such as equine infectious anemia,⁸ which they can transmit to horses and other equines, and equine herpesvirus 9,⁹ which they can transmit to other animals.

Kangaroos, wallabies, and wallaroos require extremely large, grassy areas in which to live and interact with others of the same species for their social well-being. In the pet trade, joeys (baby macropods) are often prematurely taken from their mothers, which can cause long-term psychological harm if they survive the early separation. Additionally, macropods require specialized diets and are prone to serious captivity-related health issues such as lumpy jaw (inflammation and infection of the jaw bone),¹⁰ gastrointestinal blockages, and fatal toxoplasmosis infections,¹¹ which can infect humans.

³ Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/14/us/maryland-zebra-captured.html>

⁴ Available at: <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/prince-georges-county/owner-of-escaped-maryland-zebras-found-not-guilty-of-animal-cruelty/3453213/>

⁵ See, e.g., <https://news4sanantonio.com/news/local/11-year-old-boy-bitten-by-a-kangaroo-in-his-own-northwest-side-backyard-san-antonio-animal-care-services-texas-sonoma-ranch-red>

⁶ Available at: https://ielc.libguides.com/sdzg/factsheets/plains_zebra/behavior

⁷ Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749073917307137>

⁸ Available at: <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/equine/infectious-anemia>

⁹ Available at: <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/17337/>

¹⁰ Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7690803/>

¹¹ Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11858611/>

Community Resources

Keeping exotic animals as pets unnecessarily strains community resources. Local police officers and other first responders generally are not trained or equipped to handle escaped wild animals and are often put in danger in such situations. The time and expense required to respond to such incidents also strain resources needed elsewhere. In the U.S., escaped zebras and kangaroos have led first responders on numerous prolonged and dangerous search efforts, resulting in roadway closures, accidents, and in some cases, the animals' deaths.¹²

The presence of these animals in the community also strains the resources of nonprofit animal sanctuaries. When private owners realize the dangers and costs associated with keeping exotic animals as pets, they often end up relinquishing them to wildlife sanctuaries. With limited resources, these sanctuaries sadly cannot assist every animal in need of rescue.

Removing the Helper Monkey Exemption

HB 53 also removes an exemption from Maryland's dangerous animal law that permits the use of "helper monkeys." Helper monkeys (often capuchin monkeys) are intended to assist individuals with mobility-limiting disabilities by performing daily tasks. Despite the importance of ensuring that people living with disabilities receive the assistance and support needed to thrive, monkeys—even those raised in captivity and socialized to humans—are non-domesticated wild animals with unpredictable behavior. The Americans with Disabilities Act's implementing regulations define "service animal" as only including dogs.¹³

Removing the helper monkey exemption will enhance public safety. Small monkeys have attacked their owners, other people, and children in numerous incidents across the U.S., including in Maryland. For example, in 2009 in Salem, Oregon, a small monkey brought to a park by his owner bit a six-year-old girl, requiring the girl to take antibiotics.¹⁴ Monkeys can also transmit life-threatening diseases to humans, including yellow fever, pox viruses, hepatitis, foamy virus, herpes B virus, Ebola, dengue, and simian immunodeficiency virus.¹⁵ The risk of injury or infection from a primate may pose an even more serious hazard to someone living with a disability.

Furthermore, helper monkeys are now uncommon. Helping Hands (now Envisioning Access) was the primary organization that trained and placed helper monkeys, but no longer does so.¹⁶ Their business now focuses on innovative assistive technologies such as robots to improve individuals' mobility, access, and quality of life.

Conclusion

¹² See, e.g.: <https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/30/us/video/alabama-kangaroo-interstate-digvid>; <https://abc11.com/post/pet-zebra-escapes-home-is-fatally-shot-by-its-owner/5224119/>

¹³ Available at: <https://www.ada.gov/resources/service-animals-2010-requirements/>

¹⁴ Available at: <https://kcby.com/news/local/monkey-in-diaper-bites-girl-6-in-city-park-11-13-2015>

¹⁵ Available at: <https://www.nationalacademies.org/read/10713/chapter/5>

¹⁶ Available at: <https://www.envisioningaccess.org/>

Prohibiting the private possession of zebras, kangaroos, wallaroos, and wallabies, as well as removing the outdated exemption for helper monkeys, ensures the safety of Maryland citizens and protects these animals from suffering as pets. I respectfully request your support for HB 53.

Sincerely,

Kate Dylewsky
Assistant Director, Government Affairs
Animal Welfare Institute
www.awionline.org

Criminal Law – Nondomesticated Animal Prohibitions

Uploaded by: Lisa Radov

Position: FAV



MARYLAND VOTES FOR ANIMALS

PO Box 10411
BALTIMORE, MD 21209

February 5, 2026

To: House Judiciary Committee
From: Lisa Radov, President and Chair, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.
Re: Criminal Law – Non-domesticated Animal Prohibitions – Alterations– HB 53 -Support

Chair Bartlett, Vice - Chair Davis, members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Lisa Radov. I am the President and Chair of Maryland Votes for Animals. We champion humane legislation to improve the lives of animals in Maryland. Speaking for Maryland Votes for Animals, our Board of Directors, and our members across Maryland, I respectfully request that the House Judiciary Committee vote favorably for Criminal Law – Non-domesticated Animal Prohibitions – Alterations – HB 53.

This bill would expand the list of wild animals prohibited for private ownership in Maryland to include Zebras, Kangaroos, Wallaroos, and Wallabies. It would alter a certain exception to the prohibition against importing, offering for sale, trading, bartering, possessing, breeding, or exchanging certain live, non-domesticated animals and repealing a certain other exception; prohibiting certain live non-domesticated animals from being imported, offered for sale, traded, bartered, possessed, bred, or exchanged on or after a certain date, subject to a certain exception; and generally relating to the prohibition against the importation, sale, trade, barter, possession, breeding, or exchange of certain non-domesticated animals.

Currently, Maryland law already prohibits private ownership of a list of wild animals that includes bears, nonhuman primates, wild cats, and certain venomous snakes. HB 53 would simply add zebras, kangaroos, wallabies, and walleroos to that list to address public safety and animal welfare concerns. This is an issue of protecting the public from injury or even death from an encounter with these wild animals.

Zebras have repeatedly escaped from private owners and licensed exhibitors and breeders, including in Maryland, requiring response from law enforcement and expenditure of public resources. Kangaroos and wallabies (part of a category of animals known as macropods), are readily available for sale online and escapes of these animals are on the rise.

In Upper Marlboro, Maryland, several zebras escaped from a farm owned by a USDA-licensed breeder in 2021. One was found dead in a snare trap but it took four months to capture all of the zebras, who roamed through residential neighborhoods in Upper Marlboro. Zebras are strong, muscular animals with unpredictable behavior, including biting and kicking that can cause serious internal injuries. Kangaroos can exceed 6 feet in height and weigh up to 200 lbs. Wallabies can reach 3 feet tall and weigh 30 - 60 lbs. Both species can inflict serious injuries through powerful kicks and sharp claws.

HB 53 would continue to allow licensed and regulated individuals and facilities to own these animals. Expanding this law to include zebras and macropods will help law enforcement and protect communities. The Maryland Legislature has already banned private ownership of many wild animals in the interest of protecting the public. This bill would simply add these animals to MD Code 10-621.

Zebras, Kangaroos, Wallabies, and Walleroos should not be pets!

In closing, I would like to thank Delegate Lehman for her sponsorship of HB 53 and ask the committee for a favorable report.

FAVORABLE - Maryland HB 53.pdf

Uploaded by: Liz Cabrera Holtz

Position: FAV



February 3, 2026
House Judiciary Committee
HB 53
End Private Possession of Zebras, Kangaroos, and Wallabies

FAVORABLE

To: Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

From: Liz Cabrera Holtz, Maryland Resident and Senior Campaigns Manager at World Animal Protection

As a Maryland resident and on behalf of World Animal Protection and our Maryland supporters, I urge the committee to support HB 53, which would end the private possession of zebras, kangaroos, and wallabies. Maryland already prohibits the private possession of many wild animals, including nonhuman primates and wild cats. HB 53 would address gaps in Maryland's private possession laws and promote public safety and animal welfare.

Zebras have escaped multiple times from private homes, as well as licensed exhibitors and breeders, both across the country and in Maryland. These incidents require extensive law enforcement and public resources. Kangaroos and wallabies—members of a category known as macropods—are easily purchased online, experience significant harm within the pet trade, and are increasingly escaping from captivity.

Protecting Public Safety

Zebras are wild animals who behave unpredictably, often biting and kicking. Their kick can break human bones and cause serious internal injuries. Kangaroos and wallabies are part of the family Macropodidae. Kangaroos can reach up to 200 pounds. Kangaroos are muscular animals who can balance on their tails to execute forceful kicks with their sharply clawed feet. [A kangaroo's kick can be lethal to humans](#). In 2025, a man was [killed](#) by a kangaroo at a children's petting zoo in South Carolina. Wallabies can reach up to 60 pounds. Like kangaroos, they have strong hind legs and sharp claws.

Advancing Animal Welfare

When kept in human homes, wild animals like zebras, kangaroos, and wallabies are deprived of the ability to engage in their natural behaviors, resulting in physical and psychological suffering. An enclosure in a house or yard cannot replicate the space and freedom these animals enjoy in the wild.

Kangaroos and wallabies are commonly sold by breeders, dealers, and at auctions—suffering each step of the way. Joeys are prematurely taken from their mothers before they are weaned, which results in long-term physical and psychological deficits. It is also very difficult to provide their specialized diets and to find veterinarians who can treat them knowledgeably.

To protect public safety and advance animal welfare, World Animal Protection urges the passage of HB 53.

Liz Cabrera Holtz
Senior Campaigns Manager, World Animal Protection
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HB53 Nondomesticated Animal Prohibitions – Alterat

Uploaded by: Mary Lehman

Position: FAV

DELEGATE MARY A. LEHMAN

Legislative District 21
Prince George's and
Anne Arundel Counties

Government, Labor, and
Elections Committee

Chair

Local Government/Bi-County
Agencies and Administration
Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

House Judiciary Committee

February 5, 2026

FAVORABLE

Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present House Bill 53. HB 53 proposes a focused, necessary update to Maryland's existing law prohibiting the trade, breeding of, or possession of specific wild animals, but includes common sense exceptions. The goal of this legislation is to strengthen public safety, relieve burdens on law enforcement and animal management staff, and ensure the humane treatment of wild animals.

Maryland law already prohibits the trade, breeding and possession of many inherently dangerous species, including bears, nonhuman primates, wild cats, and certain venomous snakes, with exceptions for certain licensed facilities. It has been more than a decade since this statute was updated. HB 53 builds on that well established foundation by adding zebras, kangaroos, wallabies, and wallaroos to the list. These are species whose recent escape and injury records make clear that they pose significant risks when kept by private individuals. HB 53 also repeals an outdated exemption for certain so-called "helper animals" without affecting legitimate service animals.

Protecting public safety and conserving public resources

Public safety concerns are neither hypothetical nor rare. In 2021, multiple zebras escaped from a USDA-licensed breeding facility in Prince George's County and roamed residential neighborhoods for months, triggering a multi-agency response. Similar problems occur nationwide and involve other species as well: kangaroos, wallabies, and wallaroos have escaped at least 83 times across 25 states since 2015 and adult male kangaroos, reaching up to 200 pounds, can inflict serious injuries. These incidents strain animal control, law enforcement and medical response resources and highlight that private individuals simply cannot meet the complex needs or safely contain these wild animals.

HB 53 ensures that these species may only be kept by licensed, regulated facilities with appropriate expertise.

Repealing an outdated exemption for certain so-called "helper animals"

Additionally, the bill removes one narrow and outdated exemption that historically allowed certain wild animals, primarily nonhuman primates, to be used as so-called "helper" animals. This exemption is inconsistent with:

- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which since 2010 recognizes only dogs (and in limited cases, miniature horses) as service animals
- The American Veterinary Medical Association, which opposes the use of primates as assistance animals due to the high risks of human injury, zoonotic disease transmission and severe animal welfare concerns
- Modern disability access standards, which emphasize safer and more effective alternatives such as assistive technology

Using nonhuman primates as “helper animals” is both dangerous and deeply inhumane. Nonhuman primates can transmit serious diseases, like the often-fatal Herpes B virus commonly carried by macaques, and have caused hundreds of severe injuries, many to children. Primates bred for this purpose are taken from their mothers early, leading to lifelong psychological trauma, and often endure cruel practices such as tooth removal or shock-based training. Exploiting wild animals in this way is unnecessary and ethically indefensible.

All Maryland service-animal statutes remain intact

HB 53 does not alter, limit, or affect *any* of Maryland’s existing service animal programs or protections. All protections under Titles 7, 9, and 10 remain fully in place, including the state’s service animal program, veteran service animal program, court dog program, and laws safeguarding service animals from harm or interference. The legislation updates wild animal possession rules without altering any rights or accommodation for people who rely on legitimate service animals.

Conclusion

By adding zebras, kangaroos, wallabies, and wallaroos to Maryland’s existing wild animal restrictions, HB 53 ensures these species are kept only by licensed facilities subject to the requirements of the federal Animal Welfare Act. HB 53 strengthens public safety, reduces avoidable burdens on law enforcement, promotes responsible stewardship and ensures Maryland law keeps pace with modern science and service animal standards. This legislation is measured, and it builds on the General Assembly’s longstanding approach to protecting communities from inherently risky wild animals.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to give House Bill 53 a favorable report. Thank you for your consideration.

FOUR PAWS support for HB 53.pdf

Uploaded by: Melanie Lary

Position: FAV



Animal Welfare.
Worldwide.

February 3, 2026

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of FOUR PAWS USA and our supporters in Maryland, we kindly ask for your support of House Bill 53, which would prohibit the private ownership of zebras, kangaroos, wallabies, and wallaroos by adding them to Maryland's existing list of dangerous wild animals that are prohibited for trade, breeding, and possession, with limited exceptions. This bill will benefit both animal welfare and public safety.

As a global animal welfare organization with 13 sanctuaries around the world, FOUR PAWS has years of expertise concerning the rescue, rehabilitation, and sanctuary care of bears, big cats, and other wild animals rescued from terrible conditions in captivity. All these wild animals, including kangaroos, wallabies, wallaroos, and zebras, have complex emotional, behavioral, and physical needs that make them extremely difficult to keep as pets and ill-suited for life in captivity.

Stuck in poor welfare conditions and without proper nutrition, these wild animals can develop severe health problems, abnormal behaviors, and psychological stress resulting in fear or aggression towards people and new environments. Zebras are strong, non-domesticated animals that can be easily stressed and have a kick that can break human bones and cause internal injuries. Kangaroos can be over six feet tall and weigh 200 pounds, while wallabies can stand over three feet tall and weigh between 30 to 60 pounds. Both have sharp claws and powerful kicks that can cause immense damage and injury to the people around them. And when they escape from private owners or exhibitors, the potential for dangerous encounters with other animals and people escalates, putting the health of the animals and the safety of the public at risk. According to the Humane World for Animals, "There have been at least 83 kangaroo, wallaby, or wallaroo, escapes in 25 states since 2015. Nearly half of these were animals apparently kept as pets." And unfortunately in many cases, the escaped animals are either shot by law enforcement, found dead, or never found at all.

Overall, these wild animals have complex ecological needs and requirements that cannot be met in captivity or by private owners. This is why FOUR PAWS supports HB 53 and urges the Committee members to please do the same, as it is a commonsense bill that protects both the public and the wellbeing of these wild animals from an inhumane life as pets in captivity.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Melanie Lary

Research and Campaigns Manager

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HB0053 Nondomesticated animal prohibitions-alterat

Uploaded by: Patty Crankshaw-Quimby

Position: FAV



Maryland's Association of Animal Care and Control Agencies and Humane Societies

**PO Box 1143
Easton, Maryland 21601**

**HB0053 Criminal Law- Non-domesticated Animal Prohibitions- Alterations
Maryland House of Delegates Judiciary Committee**

February 3, 2026

Dear Honorable Chair Bartlett, Vice-Chair Davis, and members of the committee:

Professional Animal Workers of Maryland, the state organization of animal control agencies and humane societies unanimously supports and encourages a favorable and speedy report on HB0053.

Maryland has a strong prohibition for exotics in 10-621 of the Maryland Annotated Code which allows us to protect these animals from exploitation and the safety of the citizens in our communities. Over recent years new animals have moved onto the exotic's scene, specifically zebras, wallabies, wallaroos, and kangaroos. We need only google "Zebra loose in MD" to find one of the most notable incidents in recent years- 3 zebras ran loose for months in 2021 costing taxpayers' money and ending in one of the animals dying a painful death in the wild. As we saw from this incident local agencies are not properly equipped for the specific needs and behaviors of these animals thus adding to the already stretched time and resources of animal control and police agencies.

These animals have extremely specific needs and require specialized environments for their wellbeing and for proper confinement. When we consider the humane aspect of owning these animals, preventing exploitation, and ensuring the humane care of these animals should also be considered.

The passing of HB0053 to update Code 10-621 to include Zebras, wallabies, wallaroos, and kangaroos is a reasonable request to protect animals from exploitation and ensure safe communities. We ask for a favorable report on HB0053.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Patty Crankshaw-Quimby, CAWA

Executive Director/Chief Animal Control Officer: Talbot Humane/ Talbot County Animal Control

President: Professional Animal Workers of Maryland

HB 53 Humane World for Animals Testimony + Appendi

Uploaded by: Stacey Volodin

Position: FAV



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Humane Society International

February 3, 2026

To: House Judiciary Committee
RE: HB 53, criminal law – nondomesticated animal prohibitions – alterations
Position: Support

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of Humane World for Animals and our members and supporters in Maryland, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of HB 53.

HB 53 advances public safety and animal welfare by amending Md. Code, Criminal Law §10 - 621 to include the prohibition of the private possession of zebras, kangaroos, wallabies and wallaroos in Maryland. Our law already prohibits private ownership of numerous dangerous wild animals, including bears, nonhuman primates, wild cats and certain venomous snakes. HB 53 is a simple, and targeted expansion of that framework. This bill maintains appropriate exceptions in that existing framework, including an exception for licensed animal exhibitors.

Public safety risks are real and recurring

Zebras are wild, nondomesticated animals with unpredictable behavior; they can bite and kick with force sufficient to break bones and cause internal injuries. Unsuspecting people, including owners of these animals, have been seriously harmed. For example, in 2023, a 72-year-old man in Ohio was hospitalized after his arm was almost bitten off by a zebra he kept as a pet. The zebra was highly agitated and charged at police, fire crews, and members of the man's family before police shot and killed the animal. In 2025, a zebra in Tennessee escaped one day after being brought to a new property as a pet. The animal was loose for a week, ran through traffic on both sides on the interstate highway (causing it to be shut down), and was eventually captured and airlifted via helicopter and returned to the owner's property—events not only stressful to the animal, but also highly risky to the public and law enforcement.

In Maryland, this danger is not theoretical. In 2021, between three and seven zebras escaped from a farm owned by a USDA-licensed breeder and roamed through residential neighborhoods in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. Over four weeks later, one zebra was found dead with their leg caught in a snare trap just outside of the owner's property. Two zebras remained at large for nearly four months before being recaptured in December 2021. Reports varied as to the number of animals who escaped. The Prince George's County Animal Services Division and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources were involved in efforts to locate and recapture the animals. The USDA, which enforces the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA), issued critical citations to the owner, Jerry Holly, for violations of the federal law in relation to the escapes and death. In 2023, Holly's AWA license was revoked, and he agreed to transfer ownership of all regulated animals and pay \$15,000 to settle allegations of violations of the federal law.

Escapes and attacks by macropods (kangaroos and wallabies) are on the rise. At least 83 kangaroo, wallaby or wallaroo escapes have been documented across 25 states since 2015, with nearly half apparently kept as pets. These incidents create repeated risks to motorists, first responders and nearby residents. Kangaroos can stand over six feet tall and weigh up to 200 pounds; wallabies can reach three feet tall and weigh 30–60 pounds. Both can deliver powerful kicks and deep lacerations with sharp claws.



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Adult male kangaroos may perceive people, again, including even the owners of these animals, as rivals and attack, leading to serious or even fatal injuries. In 2025, law enforcement believed that a [South Carolina man was killed](#) from multiple blunt force injuries from fighting a kangaroo in an enclosure at an unlicensed petting zoo. In 2017, a [nine-year-old girl in Alabama required 14 stitches](#) after she was attacked by a kangaroo at a roadside zoo. The animal reached through the enclosure fence, grabbed her by the hair, and bit her on the head. In 2011, an animal handler in Ohio was transported by MedFlight and hospitalized after he was attacked for 15 minutes by a 6-foot, 200-pound male kangaroo. Young and small wallabies also injure people: adults and children have been bitten, scratched, and jumped on by macropods used in encounters.

We track media- and government-reported dangerous incidents with wild animals, and a selection of recent, dangerous incidents and escapes involving zebras, kangaroos, wallabies, and wallaroos are listed in the Appendix.

Animal welfare concerns are significant

Beyond the public safety risks associated with the private possession of wild animals, the environments in which people come into close contact with these animals can spark interest in keeping these species as pets. Allowing the public to interact with wild animals in a captive setting not only causes stress to the animal, it inspires people to obtain wild animals as pets.¹ Studies have shown that close encounters with wild animals, including bringing them to events and sharing images of people interacting with them, fuel the exotic pet industry.²

Kangaroos, wallabies and wallaroos are readily available for sale online from wild animal breeders and dealers and at animal auctions. These animals suffer in the pet trade. Joeys (baby kangaroos, wallabies and wallaroos) are often removed from their mothers prematurely, which can cause lifelong psychological and physical harm. In 2022, the Pennsylvania Game Commission reported that [a 6-month-old kangaroo offered for sale illegally online](#) for \$5,000 was found wrapped in a blanket and stashed inside a closet when it was seized by officials. In captivity, kangaroos require specialized diets and are vulnerable to serious ailments such as “lumpy jaw,” gastrointestinal obstructions, predator attacks, salmonellosis, obesity, pneumonia, and toxoplasmosis (which has killed dozens of kangaroos and wallabies and can

¹ Lenzi, C., Speiran, S., & Grasso, C. (2019). “Let Me Take a Selfie”: Reviewing the Implications of Social Media for Public Perceptions of Wild Animals. *Society & Animals*.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332319931_Let_Me_Take_a_Selfie_Reviewing_the_Implications_of_Social_Media_for_Public_Perceptions_of_Wild_Animals; Cronin, K. A., Leahy, M., Ross, S. R., Schook, M. W., Ferrie, G. M., & Alba, A. C. (2022). Younger generations are more interested

than older generations in having non-domesticated animals as pets. *PLoS ONE*, 17(1), e0262208. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0262208>;

Nekaris, B. K. A., Campbell, N., Coggins, T. G., Rode, E. J., & Nijman, V. (2013). Tickled to Death: Analysing Public Perceptions of ‘Cute’ Videos of

Threatened Species (Slow Lorises – *Nycticebus* spp.) on Web 2.0 Sites. *PLoS ONE*, 8(7), e69215. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0069215>;

Waters, S., Setchell, J. M., Maréchal, L., Oram, F., Wallis, J., Cheyne, S. M., The IUCN Primate Specialist Group, Section for Human-Primate

Interactions, Brooke Aldrich, Sherrie Alexander, Liana Chua, Tara Clarke, Malene Friis Hansen, Carolyn Jost-Robinson, Kimberley Hockings, Marni

LaFleur, Lucy Radford, Erin Riley, & Amanda Webber. (n.d.). *Best Practice Guidelines for Responsible Images of Non-Human Primates*.

<https://www.arcusfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Best-Practices-for-Responsible-Images-of-Nonhuman-Primates.pdf>; Clarke, T. A.,

Reuter, K. E., LaFleur, M., & Schaefer, M. S. (2019). A viral video and pet lemurs on Twitter. *PLoS ONE*, 14(1), e0208577.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0208577>; Alex, B. (2012). No more cuddly selfies with our ape cousins, top conservation body warns scientists:

New rules are meant avoid misleading the public about wild animals. *Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abg6546>

² Freund, C. A., Cronin, K. A., Huang, M., Robinson, N. J., Yoo, B., & DiGiorgio, A. L. (2023). Effects of captions on viewers' perceptions of images

depicting human-primate interaction. *Conservation Biology*, 38(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.14199>; Cronin, K. A., Leahy, M., Ross, S. R., Schook,

M. W., Ferrie, G. M., & Alba, A. C. (2022). Younger generations are more interested than older generations in having non-domesticated animals as

pets. *PLoS ONE*, 17(1), e0262208. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0262208>; Moorhouse, T. P., Balaskas, M., D’Cruze, N. C., & Macdonald, D. W.

(2016). Information could reduce consumer demand for exotic pets. *Conservation Letters*, 10(3), 337–345. <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12270>



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also affect humans).

Unlike licensed facilities that are subject to the federal Animal Welfare Act, private owners are unregulated and uninspected, leaving animals in potentially substandard conditions.

HB 53 builds on Maryland's precedent and supports law enforcement

By extending Maryland's existing dangerous wild animal law to include zebras, kangaroos, wallabies and wallaroos, HB 53 will aid law enforcement and protect communities by ensuring these species are kept only by licensed, regulated entities. This is a measured, common-sense step consistent with the legislature's past determinations about inherently risky species.

For the reasons above, Humane World for Animals respectfully urges a favorable report on HB 53. This bill advances Maryland's longstanding commitment to public safety, responsible stewardship and humane treatment of animals.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Stacey Volodin
Maryland State Director
Humane World for Animals
svolodin@humaneworld.org

Appendix

Selected dangerous incidents with zebras

May 31, 2025/Rutherford County, Tennessee: A zebra kept as a pet escaped less than 24 hours after his owners obtained him. The animal ran down both sides of an interstate, forcing law enforcement to shut down the roadway, and was also seen in residential neighborhoods. Law enforcement used a drone to track the zebra, who remained at large for over a week, before the animal was tranquilized, recaptured, and airlifted via helicopter.

Dominic Genetti, "Zebra escapes in Tennessee, runs loose on interstate near Nashville," *My Journal Courier*, June 3, 2025.

"A runaway pet zebra has been captured in Tennessee," *Associated Press*, June 8, 2025.

Austin Hornbostel, "Escaped zebra captured in Rutherford County after more than a week on the loose," *The Tennessean*, June 10, 2025.

March 12, 2023/Circleville, Ohio: A 72-year-old man was hospitalized after his arm was almost bitten off by a zebra he had been keeping as a pet. The zebra was highly agitated and charged at police, fire crews, and members of the man's family. The man's arm was reattached at the hospital. Police shot and killed the zebra.

Carla Sinclair, "Ohio man hospitalized after 'pet' zebra nearly bites off his arm," *Boing Boing*, March 13, 2023.

Bethany Bruner, "Ohio man hospitalized after pet zebra bites arm," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 13, 2023.

January 24, 2023/Dahlonega, Georgia: A zebra at Chestatee Wildlife Preserve bit a member of the public on the fingers, drawing blood, after the person fed the zebra.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Inspection Report, Chestatee Wildlife Preserve Inc., 57-C-0325, January 24, 2023.

August 22, 2021/Upper Marlboro, Maryland: Between three to seven zebras escaped from a farm owned by a USDA-licensed breeder and roamed through residential neighborhoods. Over four weeks later, one zebra was found dead with their leg caught in a snare trap just outside of the owner's property. Two zebras remained at large for nearly four months before being recaptured in December 2021. Reports varied as to the number of animals who escaped. The Prince George's County Animal Services Division and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources were involved in efforts to locate and recapture the animals. The USDA issued critical citations to the owner, Jerry Holly, in relation to the escapes and death. In 2023, Holly's USDA license was revoked, and he agreed to transfer ownership of all regulated animals and pay \$15,000 to settle allegations of violations of the federal Animal Welfare Act.

Paul Wagner, "Zebras spotted in Prince George's County," *NBC Washington*, September 8, 2021.

Richard Luscombe, "Escaped zebras bamboozle Maryland officials: 'They're just too fast,'" *The Guardian*, September 10, 2021.

Nathan Baca, Scott Broom, "After months on the loose, 2 missing PG County zebras officially located," *WUSA9*, December 14, 2021.

USDA Inspection Report, Jerry L Holly, Lic. No. 51-A-0044, September 20, 2021, November 9, 2021, November 22, 2023.

May 7, 2021/Cookeville, Tennessee: A zebra escaped from a truck parked at Triple W Alternative Livestock Auction. The animal ran onto a highway and was reportedly tased before being captured. Officials from local police and the sheriff's office spent three hours attempting to corner the zebra, who was described as agitated and mad, including with stun guns. An elementary school issued a

"Law enforcement help capture loose zebra in middle Tennessee," *ABC7 Chicago*, May 8, 2021.

"Zebra -- yes, a zebra -- captured after escape in Cookeville," *NewsChannel5 Nashville*, May 7, 2021.

warning about the escaped animal.	
<p>August 7, 2019/New Braunfels, Texas: Two zebras escaped from a pen and swam across the Guadalupe River. Police pursued one of the zebras for several hours along city streets before the animal was corralled, tranquilized, airlifted to a truck, and returned to its owners, where it died hours later. The second zebra was also returned to the property but escaped again the following day and was later found dead outside of its pen.</p>	<p>“2 zebras who escaped animal refuge in New Braunfels die after they are recaptured,” <i>mysanantonio.com</i>, August 8, 2019. “Zebras that took officers on wild chase through New Braunfels have died, police say,” <i>KABB</i>, August 8, 2019.</p>
<p>March 27, 2019/Callahan, Florida: Two neighbors watched as a man shot and killed his pet zebra. The zebra had escaped and darted into a nearby field after apparently being startled by police cars.</p>	<p>“Escaped zebra shot, killed in Callahan,” <i>firstcoastnews.com</i>, March 27, 2019.</p>
<p>April 2015/Muskogee, Oklahoma: A pet zebra attacked a man who was pulling weeds near the animal’s pen. The zebra bit off a portion of the man’s nipple, for which the victim needed seven stitches. The man stated, “It hurt. It was very severe. It was very traumatizing.”</p>	<p>“Woman forced to get rid of pet zebra after it bites off man’s nipple,” <i>Inquisitr</i>, April 30, 2015.</p>
<p>March 15, 2015/Searcy, Arkansas: A man was attacked by his father’s pet zebra and sustained injuries to his eye and arm. Two days after the attack he was still in the hospital in serious condition.</p>	<p>“Arkansas judge mauled by family’s pet zebra,” <i>NBC News</i>, March 17, 2015. Danielle Kloap, “Searcy man still in hospital after zebra attack,” <i>Democrat-Gazette</i>, March 17, 2015.</p>
<p>November 28, 2012/Staten Island, New York: A pet zebra and pony escaped when their owner forgot to shut a gate. The two were nearly hit by a car as they ran back and forth across a busy road. They then ran through a busy parking lot and along a street toward an elementary school where they stopped traffic. The owner ultimately led them home with food.</p>	<p>Mark D. Stein, “Zebra and pony on the lam in Staten Island have returned home,” <i>Staten Island Real-Time News</i>, November 28, 2012.</p>

Selected dangerous incidents with macropods

June 15, 2025/Oswego, New York: A wallaby escaped from Grace & Glory Animals through an open gate. The animal was captured ten days later after being sighted in a trailer park, on a golf course, and near the local high school. The animal's owner noted that the animal was unfamiliar with cars and could pose a risk to drivers. The USDA issued Grace & Glory a critical citation in relation to the escape.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Inspection Report, Grace & Glory Ministries, 21-C-0430, June 17, 2025.

Dale Ostrander, "Wallaby on the loose in Town of Oswego prompts community search effort," CNY Central, June 17, 2025.

Clare Normoyle, "Oswego County Wallaby, Mac, returned home after over a week on the loose," WSYR-TV, June 25, 2025.

May 9, 2025/Loris, South Carolina: A man was found dead with "multiple blunt injuries" in an enclosure containing a kangaroo and wallabies at 5 Star Farm. The victim's brother reportedly said that the victim liked to enter the enclosure and "roughhouse" with a male kangaroo.

Eric Richards, "Horry County farm owner speaks out after brother found dead in kangaroo enclosure," WMBF, May 12, 2025.

Richard Luscombe, "Man died of 'blunt force injuries' at US zoo after suspected kangaroo fight," The Guardian, May 12, 2025.

April 29, 2025/Auburn, AL: A kangaroo, owned by petting zoo operators who described the animal as a personal pet, escaped and ran down an interstate highway in a neighboring county, causing a two-car crash and resulting in both sides of the highway being shut down while the kangaroo was recaptured. State highway troopers responded to the crash and assisted with the recapture of the animal. The kangaroo was recaptured after being shot twice with a tranquilizer gun. The USDA cited the facility for the escape.

Jon Haworth, "Sheila the runaway kangaroo causes car crash, shuts down Alabama highway," ABC News, April 30, 2025.

Carol Robinson, "A kangaroo loose on an Alabama interstate? 'We see a little bit of everything,' sheriff says," al.com, April 29, 2025.

US Department of Agriculture, Inspection Report, Starco Group LLC, 64-C-0249, May 9, 2025.

November 9, 2024/Chavies, Kentucky: A wallaby kept as a pet escaped and was spotted in a resident's yard on home security footage. The wallaby was found and returned to their owner a few days later with assistance from a thermal drone recovery company.

Dave Spencer, "Australian wallaby found wandering through KY neighborhood," WBKR, November 13, 2024.

FOX TV digital team, "Video: Missing wallaby captured in Kentucky after days on the lam," FOX TV, November 14, 2024.

August 15, 2024/El Paso, Texas: A child was scratched on the face during an interaction with a wallaby at Jungle Reef. According to the boy's mother, the wallaby "jumped up and clawed my 2 year old son in the face, on both sides [...] and swiped at my son's legs. She has super sharp claws and nobody warned us of that or we would have never let our babies in the barn. Even after that occurred and we were waiting to make an incident report, they were continuing to allow children into the barn with the wallaby." Later that day, the wallaby was inadvertently crushed to death in a door by an employee.

Elida S. Perez, "'Heartbreaking': Concerns rise over Jungle Reef mall aquarium conditions, compliance issues," El Paso Matters, September 8, 2024.

Stephanie, Google review of Jungle Reef, August 15, 2024.

May 18, 2024/Lufkin, Texas: Two kangaroos kept as a

Patrick Reilley, "Kangaroos run loose in Texas,

<p>pets escaped through an open gate. Police dashcam footage showed one of the kangaroos hopping in front of the police car in a neighborhood as they responded to reports of the loose animals.</p>	<p>baffling local residents: 'Ma'am, I don't know who I need to call,'" <i>New York Post</i>, May 24, 2024. Priscilla Aguirre, "Texas police capture loose kangaroo in Lufkin," <i>Imtonline.com</i>, May 30, 2024.</p>
<p>February 18, 2024/Texarkana, Texas: A kangaroo kept as a pet escaped from a family who brought the animal to an outing at Spring Lake Park. Police captured the kangaroo. The kangaroo had originally been used in a petting zoo.</p>	<p>Mario Garcia, "Meet the kangaroo that was spotted in a Texarkana Park," <i>KKYR</i>, February 19, 2024.</p>
<p>February 8, 2024/Tampa, Florida: A kangaroo kept as a pet escaped and got trapped in the pool area of an apartment complex. A resident who spotted the loose animal called 911. The kangaroo was captured by the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office and returned to the owner.</p>	<p>Brad Matthews, "Escaped kangaroo rescued from pool area of Tampa apartment complex," <i>The Washington Times</i>, February 10, 2024.</p>
<p>February 7, 2024/Harrogate, Tennessee: An escaped pet wallaby was spotted roaming across a campus by students at Lincoln Memorial before entering nearby woods. Local and state officials worked to locate the wallaby, who was eventually recaptured.</p>	<p>Hope McAlee, "Escaped wallaby spotted at Lincoln Memorial University captured," <i>WATE</i>, February 7, 2024.</p>
<p>February 8, 2024/Tampa, Florida: A kangaroo kept as a pet escaped and got trapped in the pool area of an apartment complex. A resident who spotted the loose animal called 911. The kangaroo was captured by the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office and returned to the owner.</p>	<p>Brad Matthews, "Escaped kangaroo rescued from pool area of Tampa apartment complex," <i>The Washington Times</i>, February 10, 2024.</p>
<p>December 2023/Fresno, California: A wallaroo escaped from a walk-through exhibit at Fresno Chaffee Zoo. The wallaroo repeatedly jumped headfirst into fencing during the recapture process and suffered severe injuries.</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Agriculture, Inspection Report, Fresno's Chaffee Zoo Corporation, license #93-C-0752, December 20, 2023.</p>
<p>August 19, 2023/Brooklyn, New York: Officers with the New York Police Department confiscated a wallaby on the Coney Island boardwalk from a man who was illegally keeping the wallaby as a pet. The man was spotted in several areas walking around with the wallaby in a pouch and asked pedestrians wanting a selfie with the animal for a "donation." The man had purchased the then 9-month-old wallaby a month earlier for \$2,500 from a Wisconsin breeder and spent another \$1,300 to have the wallaby transported to him. He was issued a \$1,000 fine for illegally possessing a wild animal.</p>	<p>Alex Oliveira, "Wallaby rescued on Coney Island boardwalk 'happy' at Long Island wildlife rescue," <i>New York Post</i>, August 22, 2023. Georgia Worrell, "Owner of confiscated Coney Island wallaby misses his fur baby," <i>New York Post</i>, August 26, 2023.</p>
<p>July 25, 2023/Grantsville, Utah: A 3-year-old intact male wallaby bit a 3-year-old boy while the child was in the pen with the wallaby at Ivie Acres Farm & Petting Zoo. The boy was examined by a doctor, and the wallaby was placed under a ten-day quarantine.</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Agriculture, Inspection Report, Sherrie Ivie, license #87-C-0061, November 21, 2023.</p>
<p>July 5, 2023/Blanchard, Oklahoma: A 1-year-old 4-foot</p>	<p>Sara Smith, "Roo, the pet wallaby, missing since</p>

<p>wallaby kept as a pet on a property adjacent to a highway jumped a fence and fled into nearby woods. The police used a drone in a failed attempt to locate the missing wallaby.</p>	<p>Wednesday morning in Blanchard," KOKH, July 6, 2023. Ben Hooper, "Wallaby on the loose in Oklahoma after dog opens gate," UPI, July 7, 2023.</p>
<p>March 30, 2023/Sparta, Tennessee: A 9-month-old diapered kangaroo kept indoors as a pet escaped through a door that had been left open. The kangaroo had apparently been purchased at the Triple W exotic animal auction in Cookeville. The owner posted a \$20,000 online fundraiser to pay for searching for the kangaroo.</p>	<p>Ben Hooper, "Pet kangaroo on the loose in Tennessee," UPI, April 6, 2023. Todd Watson, "With the search for Beau," GoFundMe.com, April 5, 2023.</p>
<p>February 14, 2023/Granbury, Texas: A diapered, bottle-fed kangaroo kept as a pet jumped a backyard fence and escaped after being frightened by nearby drilling. Volunteers and drones searched wooded areas. The kangaroo returned on his own two days later.</p>	<p>Dionne Anglin, "Missing kangaroo back home in Granbury after 2-day search," FOX4, February 16, 2023.</p>
<p>October 23, 2022/Carroll County, Indiana: One of two pet kangaroos escaped near the White Oaks RV Resort. Three men retrieved the kangaroo from a lake but the kangaroo took off before he could be captured. Nearly two weeks later the kangaroo was found dead of apparent drowning in the same lake.</p>	<p>Eric Graves, "Carroll County kangaroo missing, neighbors helping search for it," FOX59, October 24, 2022. Matt Christy, "Loose Carroll County kangaroo found dead in lake," FOX59, November 2, 2022.</p>
<p>September 27, 2022/Temperance, Michigan: The USDA issued a critical citation to Even Keel Exotics for booking public encounters with a wallaby who was too young to be handled by members of the public. The USDA indicated that, based on the animal's small size, appearance, and hair coat, the joey should have still been in the mother's pouch.</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Agriculture, Inspection Report, Zachery Keeler, 34-B-0225, June 29, 2023.</p>
<p>September 22, 2022/Fort Worth, Texas: SeaQuest was cited by the USDA after a young Dama wallaby bit a child on the finger during a public contact session. According to the USDA inspector, "This facility has a history of public injury during its 'animal encounters'."</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Agriculture, Inspection Report, SeaQuest, 88-C-0216, site 003, September 22, 2022.</p>
<p>September 19, 2022/Adams County, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania Game Commission reported that a 6-month-old kangaroo offered for sale illegally online for \$5,000 was found wrapped in a blanket and stashed inside a closet when it was seized by officials.</p>	<p>"Pennsylvania man caught selling baby kangaroo for \$5,000 on Facebook, officials say," FOX 29, September 19, 2022.</p>
<p>August 8, 2022/Brewster, Ohio: During a 5-day period, residents reported seeing, and in one case videotaped, a wallaby running loose. The police fielded calls from across the country and solicited help from animal specialists who set out a trap. A neighboring town loaned them a drone to search for the wallaby. A wallaby exhibitor predicted the animal would not survive more than 3 to 6 months, due to the possibility of being hit by a car or perishing in Ohio's winter as well as a lack of nutrients necessary for their</p>	<p>Stephanie Raymond, "Wallaby is on the loose in Ohio and no one knows what to do," WBBM Newsradio, August 15, 2022. Lynna Lai, "Roo on the Run: Wandering wallaby remains elusive in Stark County Lynna Lai," WKYC, August 15, 2022.</p>

<p>survival.</p>	
<p>July 11, 2022/Gastonia, North Carolina: Gaston County Animal Control responded to a report that a loose wallaby was spotted in the neighborhood. The wallaby was being kept illegally as a pet and had escaped from the owner’s property. The owner agreed to find a new home for the wallaby.</p>	<p>Kaitlin Wright, “Wallaby Spotted In A Gaston County Neighborhood,” WCCB, July 12, 2022.</p>
<p>December 2, 2020/Peru, Illinois: A 911 center was flooded with calls about a kangaroo-like animal running down U.S. Route 6 in traffic. The animal, a wallaroo, had broken free from their owner. Police, firefighters and neighbors tried to catch the wallaroo who eventually fell into the frigid water of the Illinois River. Two fishermen out on a boat saw the wallaroo and grabbed him with a fishing net, ending the two-hour chase. A veterinarian said the wallaroo was “so cold we couldn’t register his temperature on the thermometer.” Two hours later, the wallaroo was released back to his owner.</p>	<p>Will Jones, “Wallaroo on the loose in Peru, Illinois leads police on wild chase,” WLS/ABC7, December 3, 2020.</p>
<p>September 27, 2018/Littleton, Colorado: A wallaby at SeaQuest named Ben with a history of jumping and nipping grabbed a person by the arm and scratched and kicked the person, causing the right arm to bleed.</p>	<p>Colorado Disease Control & Environmental Epidemiology Division, SeaQuest Injury Reporting Form, September 27, 2018.</p>
<p>May 6, 2017/Huntsville, Alabama: A 9-year-old girl needed 14 stitches after she was attacked by a kangaroo at Harmony Park Safari (aka Huntsville Nature Preserve). The girl screamed hysterically when the kangaroo reached through the enclosure fence, grabbed her by the hair, and bit her on the head. The girl later commented, “I’m just glad that it got me instead of my [3-year-old] sister (who had been standing next to her), because it would have hurt her even worse.” The girl’s parents, who claimed that the kangaroo had bit and attacked people in the past, sued the park for negligence and wantonness.</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Agriculture, Inspection Report, Huntsville Nature Preserve, 64-C-0141, May 8, 2017. Crystal Bonvillian, “Girl attacked by kangaroo at drive-thru zoo as mom records encounter,” Cox Media, May 8, 2017. Ashley Remkus, “Mother of kangaroo attack victim sues Alabama zoo,” AL.com, May 7, 2018. CBS New York - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_bIAYaEN8s</p>
<p>October 17, 2015/Staten Island, New York: The owner of an auto repair shop spotted a kangaroo hopping around the parking lot. The animal had escaped through the open gate of a nearby home where a man was visiting to show off his pet to friends.</p>	<p>“Kangaroo captured after hopping away from Travis home,” siadvance.com, October 17, 2015.</p>

Late testimony

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**Humane
World for
Animals™**

Formerly called the Humane
Society of the United States and
Humane Society International

Support HB 53

End private ownership of zebras, kangaroos and wallabies in Maryland

Currently, Maryland prohibits private ownership of a number of wild animals, including bears, nonhuman primates, wild cats, and certain venomous snakes. HB 53 will address public safety and animal welfare concerns by also prohibiting private ownership of zebras and kangaroos and wallabies in Maryland.

Zebras have repeatedly escaped from private owners and licensed exhibitors and breeders, including in Maryland, requiring response from law enforcement and expenditure of public resources. Kangaroos and wallabies (part of a category of animals known as macropods), are readily available for sale online, suffer tremendously in the pet trade, and escapes of these animals are on the rise.

What HB 53 will do

HB 53 will protect public safety and animal welfare by prohibiting private ownership of zebras and macropods in Maryland by amending MD Code, Criminal Law §10-621. HB 53 does not impact licensed animal exhibitors.

Builds on current MD law

The Maryland legislature has already banned private ownership of many wild animals due to public safety risks. Expanding this law to include zebras and macropods will help law enforcement and protect communities. Only licensed, regulated individuals and facilities would be allowed to possess these animals.



Protects public safety

Zebra are wild, non-domesticated animals with unpredictable behavior, including biting and kicking. They are strong, muscular and capable of overpowering people; a zebra's kick can break bones and cause internal injuries.

Kangaroos can exceed 6 feet in height and weigh up to 200 lbs. **Wallabies** can reach 3 feet tall and weigh 30–60 lbs. Both species can inflict serious injuries through powerful kicks and sharp claws. Since 2015, there have been at least 83 kangaroo, wallaby or wallaroo escapes across 25 states, nearly half involving animals kept as pets. In 2025, a man in South Carolina was believed to have been killed by a kangaroo in an enclosure at an unlicensed petting zoo.

Protects animal welfare

Zebras frequently escape due to their strong flight response and wariness, creating prolonged and risky search efforts. In 2021, a zebra escaped from a truck parked at a live animal auction in Tennessee. The animal ran onto a highway and was reportedly tased before being captured. Officials from local police and the sheriff's office spent three hours attempting to corner the zebra, who was described as agitated and mad, including with stun guns. In another case, neighbors watched as a man shot and killed his pet zebra, who had escaped and darted into a nearby

field after apparently being startled by police cars.

Wallabies and kangaroos are widely sold by breeders, dealers, and exotic animal auctions, suffering significant welfare harms throughout the trade. Joeys are prematurely taken from their mothers—well before the natural weaning age—leading to long-term psychological and physical harm. Kangaroos require specialized diets and are prone to serious captive-care issues including:

- Lumpy jaw: a highly contagious, often fatal bacterial infection linked to stress, overcrowding, poor hygiene, and cold climates.
- Gastrointestinal blockages, injuries from collisions with walls/furniture, attacks from predators, salmonellosis, obesity, and pneumonia.
- Fatal toxoplasmosis outbreaks, which can also infect humans.

Lack of regulation

Unlike licensed facilities, which are subject to the requirements of the federal Animal Welfare Act, private owners are unregulated and uninspected, allowing untold numbers of wild animals to suffer in substandard conditions. Due to the lack of regulation, it is currently unknown how many zebras and macropods are kept as pets in Maryland.

Maryland zebra escape

August 22, 2021/Upper Marlboro, Maryland: Between three to seven zebras escaped from a farm owned by a USDA-licensed breeder and roamed through residential neighborhoods. Over four weeks later, one zebra was found dead with their leg caught in a snare trap just outside of the owner's property. Two zebras remained at large for nearly four months before being recaptured in December 2021. Reports varied as to the number of animals who escaped. The Prince George's County Animal Services Division and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources were involved in efforts to locate and recapture the animals. The USDA issued critical citations to the owner, Jerry Holly, in relation to the escapes and death. In 2023, Holly's USDA license was revoked, and he agreed to transfer ownership of all regulated animals and pay \$15,000 to settle allegations of violations of the federal Animal Welfare Act.



For more information, visit humaneworld.org

MD HB53_SUPPORT_GlobalFederationAnimalSanctuaries.

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Position: FAV



Helping Sanctuaries Help Animals

February 3, 2026

Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for your consideration of **HB 53**, a bill that would strengthen Maryland’s existing dangerous animal law by prohibiting the private possession of additional wild species, including zebras and kangaroos/wallabies, and by removing the current exemption for “helper monkeys.” I am writing on behalf of the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS) to **express our strong support** for this important legislation in furtherance of public safety and animal welfare.

GFAS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with more than 215 accredited sanctuaries, rescues, and rehabilitation centers in 18 countries. GFAS was founded to differentiate and support organizations that provide the highest quality lifetime care for animals while maintaining excellence in safety, governance, and financial practices. The GFAS Standards of Excellence are internationally recognized.

Across the United States, a wide range of exotic and wild animals—including species such as zebras, kangaroos, wallabies, and nonhuman primates—are held in private hands. These animals are often acquired through breeders, dealers, or auctions, despite their highly specialized physical, behavioral, and social needs. They are routinely kept in inappropriate environments, including homes and backyards, where conditions frequently include inadequate space, improper nutrition, lack of veterinary care, and insufficient containment.

Wild animals, regardless of whether they are bred in captivity or handled from a young age, retain their natural instincts. This creates inherent risks to owners, the public, and first responders, particularly in cases of escape, injury, or neglect. Exemptions that allow certain wild animals—such as “helper monkeys”—to be kept privately undermine the intent of dangerous animal laws and place both people and animals at risk.

Importantly, GFAS-accredited sanctuaries are often left to bear the long-term financial and logistical burden when privately owned wild animals are confiscated, surrendered, or abandoned. Providing lifelong care for these animals is costly, space is limited, and the demand continues to grow as private ownership persists. Preventing private possession in the first place is one of the most effective ways to reduce this cycle of harm.

By extending Maryland’s existing prohibitions to include additional species and applying them consistently, including to Class A and Class B licensees, HB 53 represents a thoughtful and necessary step toward improving public safety and animal welfare in the state. For these reasons, GFAS strongly supports HB 53 and urges its passage.

Sincerely,

Valerie Taylor, Executive Director
Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries
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valerie@sanctuaryfederation.org

HB0053_MDVMA_INFO.pdf

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Position: INFO



Maryland Veterinary Medical Association (MDVMA)

Established in 1886, MDVMA is a volunteer, non-profit organization comprised primarily of licensed Maryland Veterinarians.

HB0053 - Criminal Law – Nondomesticated Animal Prohibitions – Alterations

Committee: Judiciary

February 3, 2026

MDVMA Position: INFO

On behalf of the Maryland Veterinary Medical Association, we submit this informational testimony on HB 53 Criminal Law –Nondomesticated Animal Prohibitions–Alterations.

We would like to thank the sponsors of the legislation who have clearly worked carefully to provide prescriptive language that limits irresponsible ownership of these animal species while offering appropriate exemptions to organizations licensed to responsibly handle, breed and exhibit them.

It is our belief as an association that responsible ownership, breeding, and exhibition of animals that do not pose imminent or immediate risk to the public should be supported in all instances. Zebras and kangaroo species likely do not pose imminent risk of harm to the public but they certainly do require uncommon containment and care practices. It is appropriate to ensure those providing for their care and containment can do so responsibly to protect these animal species and the public. We appreciate that this bill text largely preserves the rights of responsible owners to do that.

We would submit to the committee the need to ensure a network of support is pre-established to handle the intake of the species listed within this text should a situation arise in which they are found to be held illegally or found “at-large”. Such established guidance perhaps does not require inclusion to the regulations but it should be given serious consideration simply because, limiting ownership rights of animals does at times complicate the safe surrender, capture and holding efforts of those animals during emergencies or enforcement activities.

Respectfully Submitted,

Matthew Weeman DVM MS
Legislative Committee Chair & Board Member
Maryland Veterinary Medical Association