

HOUSE BILL 53

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6lr0864

(PRE-FILED)

By: **Delegates Lehman, Foley, Palakovich Carr, Ruth, Terrasa, and Ziegler**

Requested: September 16, 2025

Introduced and read first time: January 14, 2026

Assigned to: Judiciary

Committee Report: Favorable

House action: Adopted

Read second time: February 19, 2026

CHAPTER _____

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Criminal Law – Nondomesticated Animal Prohibitions – Alterations**

3 FOR the purpose of altering a certain exception to the prohibition against importing,
4 offering for sale, trading, bartering, possessing, breeding, or exchanging certain live,
5 nondomesticated animals and repealing a certain other exception; prohibiting
6 certain live nondomesticated animals from being imported, offered for sale, traded,
7 bartered, possessed, bred, or exchanged on or after a certain date, subject to a certain
8 exception; and generally relating to the prohibition against the importation, sale,
9 trade, barter, possession, breeding, or exchange of certain nondomesticated animals.

10 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
11 Article – Criminal Law
12 Section 10–621(a) and (b)(1)
13 Annotated Code of Maryland
14 (2021 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

15 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
16 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

17 **Article – Criminal Law**

18 10–621.

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

Underlining indicates amendments to bill.

~~Strike out~~ indicates matter stricken from the bill by amendment or deleted from the law by amendment.



1 (a) (1) Except as provided in subsection (b)(2) of this section, this section does
2 not apply to:

3 (i) a research facility or federal research facility licensed under the
4 federal Animal Welfare Act;

5 (ii) the holder of a Class C Exhibitor's License under the Animal
6 Welfare Act, 7 U.S.C. § 2131 et seq., that displays the animals specified in subsection (b) of
7 this section in a public setting as the exhibitor's primary function;

8 (iii) a person who possesses a valid license or permit issued by the
9 Department of Natural Resources to import, sell, trade, barter, possess, breed, or exchange
10 an animal specified in subsection (b) of this section;

11 (iv) an animal sanctuary that:

12 1. is a nonprofit organization qualified under § 501(c)(3) of
13 the Internal Revenue Code;

14 2. operates a place of refuge for abused, neglected,
15 impounded, abandoned, orphaned, or displaced wildlife;

16 3. does not conduct commercial activity with respect to any
17 animal of which the organization is an owner; and

18 4. does not buy, sell, trade, lease, or breed any animal except
19 as an integral part of the species survival plan of the [American Zoo and Aquarium
20 Association] **ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS**;

21 (v) an animal control officer under the jurisdiction of the State or a
22 local governing authority, a law enforcement officer acting under the authority of this
23 subtitle, or a private contractor of a county or municipal corporation that is responsible for
24 animal control operations;

25 (vi) a person who holds a valid license to practice veterinary medicine
26 in the State and treats the animal specified in subsection (b) of this section in accordance
27 with customary and normal veterinary practices;

28 (vii) a person who is not a resident of the State and is in the State for
29 [10 days] **48 HOURS** or less for the purpose of traveling between locations outside of the
30 State; and

31 (viii) a circus holding a Class C Exhibitor's License under the Animal
32 Welfare Act, 7 U.S.C. § 2131 et seq., that:

33 1. is in the State for less than 90 days per calendar year;

1 2. regularly conducts performances featuring live animals
2 and multiple human entertainers, including acrobats and clowns; and

3 3. does not allow members of the public to be in proximity to
4 an animal specified under subsection (b) of this section, including opportunities to be
5 photographed with the animal, without sufficient distance and protective barriers.

6 (2) (i) This section does not prohibit a person who had lawful possession
7 of an animal specified in subsection [(b)] **(B)(1)(I) THROUGH (VIII)** of this section on or
8 before May 31, 2006, from continuing to possess that animal if the person provides written
9 notification to the local animal control authority on or before August 1, 2006.

10 **(II) THIS SECTION DOES NOT PROHIBIT A PERSON WHO HAD**
11 **LAWFUL POSSESSION OF AN ANIMAL SPECIFIED IN SUBSECTION (B)(1)(IX) OR (X) OF**
12 **THIS SECTION ON OR BEFORE OCTOBER 1, 2026, FROM CONTINUING TO POSSESS**
13 **THAT ANIMAL IF THE PERSON PROVIDES WRITTEN NOTIFICATION TO THE LOCAL**
14 **ANIMAL CONTROL AUTHORITY ON OR BEFORE DECEMBER 1, 2026.**

15 [(ii)] **(III)** The notification shall include:

- 16 1. the person's name, address, and telephone number;
- 17 2. the number and type of animals being kept; and
- 18 3. a photograph of the animal or a description of a tattoo or
19 microchip identification of the animal.

20 [(3) This section does not prohibit a person who has a disability that
21 severely limits mobility from possessing an animal specified in subsection (b) of this section
22 if that animal is:

23 (i) trained to perform tasks for the owner by an organization
24 described in Section 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Code; and

25 (ii) dedicated to improving the quality of life of a person who has a
26 disability that severely limits mobility.]

27 (b) (1) A person may not import into the State, offer for sale, trade, barter,
28 possess, breed, or exchange a live:

29 (i) fox, skunk, raccoon, or bear;

30 (ii) caiman, alligator, or crocodile;

31 (iii) member of the cat family other than the domestic cat;

1 (iv) hybrid of a member of the cat family and a domestic cat if the
2 hybrid weighs over 30 pounds;

3 (v) member of the dog family other than the domestic dog;

4 (vi) hybrid of a member of the dog family and a domestic dog;

5 (vii) nonhuman primate, including a lemur, monkey, chimpanzee,
6 gorilla, orangutan, marmoset, loris, or tamarin; [or]

7 (viii) poisonous snake in the family groups of Hydrophidae, Elapidae,
8 Viperidae, or Crotolidae;

9 (IX) KANGAROO, WALLAROO, OR WALLABY; OR

10 (X) ZEBRA.

11 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect
12 October 1, 2026.

Approved:

Governor.

Speaker of the House of Delegates.

President of the Senate.