

MARYLAND ZOO

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 52

HOUSE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

JANUARY 19, 2022

POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee-

The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore strongly supports the *intent* of House Bill 52.

Created by an act of the Maryland General Assembly in 1876, The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore is owned by the City of Baltimore. It is in year 30 of a lease between the City and the State of Maryland. The Zoo is operated on behalf of the State by the non-profit Maryland Zoological Society, Inc. (MZS) through a sub-lease between the State and the MZS.

The Zoo has provided high levels of care following the best applicable standards of animal husbandry for 146 years. Its mission is to inspire and educate people to join with us in the active support and conservation of wildlife and wild places. As an entity where the staff spends each day working to save animals from extinction, the very notion of wildlife trafficking is anathema to all who work at the Zoo. The practice is antithetical to all that the Zoo stands for and represents.

However, the bill, as introduced, has the potential to be detrimental to The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore. The definition of a “bona fide scientific or educational institution” on page 3 of the bill, lines 4-6, upon first reading appears to encompass the Zoo. However, there is some question as to whether the language would do so as the tax-exempt status belongs to the MZS but the Zoo is owned by a governmental entity, the City of Baltimore. To correct this problem the Zoo offers the following amendment:

On page 3, in line 6, after “**SERVICE**” insert “**OR IS MUNICIPALLY-OWNED.**”

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Additionally, it is our understanding that there may be an amendment offered that deals with accreditation by and the standards of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). The Zoo believes that this amendment is insufficient.

While the Zoo has been accredited by the AZA since 1980, works hard to maintain it, and does not anticipate a change in that status, zoos do lose accreditation. The Salisbury Zoological Park, known as the Salisbury Zoo, had been accredited by the AZA since 1976 and lost its accreditation in 2019. The Columbus Zoo and Aquarium which had also been accredited by AZA since 1980 (and became nationally known during the tenure of its long-time director Jack Hanna), lost its accreditation in 2021. It is possible for an institution to regain AZA accreditation and the organization views the results of accreditation to be proprietary information. The AZA evaluates a plethora of items: animal welfare, care, and management (including living environments, social groupings, health, and nutrition), veterinary program, involvement in conservation and research, education programs, safety policies and procedures, security, physical facilities, guest services, and the quality of the institution's staff. Accreditation also evaluates each institution's finances, its governing authority, and its support organization. Because this examination is so comprehensive, it is difficult to envision how the Maryland Department of Natural Resources would be capable of evaluating and/or enforcing standards of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore urges the Committee to give a Favorable With Amendments report on House Bill 52.