



February 12, 2024

**Memorandum of Support – HB 379**

*An Act concerning Wildlife – Traveling Animal Acts – Prohibition*

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce and Members of the Committee:

The Animal Legal Defense Fund, the nation’s preeminent legal advocacy organization for animals, strongly supports HB 379, proposed legislation that would prohibit the participation of certain animals in a certain traveling animal act. The Animal Legal Defense Fund stands firmly against traveling animal acts because of the immense suffering involved in the training, transportation, and exhibition of wild animals. We respectfully request your support of this bill to help put an end to this cruel industry.

**Protecting animals from abuse and neglect**

Wild animals in circuses and traveling shows spend most of their days in cramped, barren cages, sometimes 24 hours a day, deprived of the ability to engage in their natural behaviors. They are typically denied anything that might satisfy their complex physical, behavioral, and emotional needs. Trainers force wild animals to perform frightening and sometimes painful tricks often by using physical violence or by withholding food and water. When they are not performing, they are being hauled back and forth across the country in poorly ventilated trailers that may not be temperature-controlled. African lions may be exposed to the freezing cold while brown bears may endure desert temperatures. Elephants are usually chained or held in small pens and big cats are kept in tiny cages. These animals are often forced to defecate and urinate in the same small space where they eat and sleep, and are rarely provided adequate exercise or social enrichment.

**Public safety risks**

Forcing wild animals into close proximity to humans creates a serious public safety risk. There have been numerous incidents of animals escaping, injuring, or even killing circus staff or members of the public. Many traveling shows are ill-equipped to protect people from dangerous wild animals. Companies usually rely on collapsible, temporary, and mobile facilities that are unable to consistently contain animals. Further, these animals are forced into unnatural encounters with humans that would never occur in the wild. The extreme stress these wild animals endure can also exacerbate aggression. Considering children are often the target audience for these events, the risks are amplified.

**Lack of regulation at the federal level**

Circuses and traveling shows are regulated by the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). But the AWA only establishes minimal standards of care for licensees in terms of housing, food, and sanitation and

permits the use of cruel bullhooks, electrical shocks, and whips. Further, enforcement is extremely lax with roughly 120 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspectors overseeing the thousands of facilities regulated by the AWA, including puppy mills, zoos, and research laboratories.

**A growing trend across the country**

Since 2016, eight states have banned or restricted the use of wild animals in traveling exhibitions. Additionally, more than 150 cities and counties across 37 states have likewise restricted or banned the use of wild animals in circuses and traveling shows, with more localities considering these types of ordinances every year. By prohibiting the transportation of animals for these cruel travelling acts, Maryland would join in becoming a leader in wild animal protection in the United States.

For these reasons, we strongly urge you to support HB 379. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Alicia Prygoski  
Strategic Legislative Affairs Manager  
Animal Legal Defense Fund