



Helping Sanctuaries Help Animals

March 23, 2026

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings 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,

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