

**MD HB53 .pdf**

Uploaded by: Amanda Gray

Position: FAV



March 23, 2026

Chair Smith  
Vice Chair Waldstreicher  
Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Room 2  
East Miller Senate Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: HB 53 (Criminal Law – Nondomesticated Animal Prohibitions – Alterations)

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings 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 HB 53, 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 HB 53.

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](http://www.PrimateSanctuaries.org)

# **HB 53 Testimony 3.23.25.pdf**

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](mailto:Devan@bornfreeusa.org)

302-757-0973

3/23/2026

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

## **HB53**

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

March 24, 2026

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
2 East Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

## **Re: Support for HB 53**

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings 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.<sup>1</sup> In 2015, a pet zebra in Arkansas mauled the adult son of his owner.<sup>2</sup>

---

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

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

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 breeder and trader of exotic animals in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> As pets, they often suffer from boredom and stress imposed by their captivity that can exacerbate aggressive behavior.<sup>7</sup> In the U.S., zebras can carry diseases such as equine infectious anemia,<sup>8</sup> which they can transmit to horses and other equines, and equine herpesvirus 9,<sup>9</sup> 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

---

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

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

<sup>5</sup> 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>

<sup>6</sup> Available at: [https://ielc.libguides.com/sdzg/factsheets/plains\\_zebra/behavior](https://ielc.libguides.com/sdzg/factsheets/plains_zebra/behavior)

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

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

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

(inflammation and infection of the jaw bone),<sup>10</sup> gastrointestinal blockages, and fatal toxoplasmosis infections,<sup>11</sup> which can infect humans.

## 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.<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup>

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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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

---

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

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

<sup>12</sup> 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/>

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

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

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

so.<sup>16</sup> Their business now focuses on innovative assistive technologies such as robots to improve individuals' mobility, access, and quality of life.

## **Conclusion**

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](http://www.awionline.org)

---

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

# **Criminal Law – Nondomesticated Animal Prohibitions**

Uploaded by: Lisa Radov

Position: FAV



## MARYLAND VOTES FOR ANIMALS

PO Box 10411  
BALTIMORE, MD 21209

March 25, 2026

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

Chair Smith, Vice - Chair Waldstreicher, members of the Judicial Proceedings 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 Senate Judicial Proceedings 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.

Expanding Maryland's law banning private ownership of wild animals to include zebras, kangaroos, walleroos, and wallabies will help law enforcement and protect communities. The Maryland Legislature has already banned private ownership of many wild animals in the interest of public safety. This bill would simply add these animals to MD Criminal 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



March 25, 2026  
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
HB 53  
End Private Possession of Zebras, Kangaroos, and Wallabies

FAVORABLE

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

# **HB53 LEHMAN WRITTEN TESTIMONY SENATE.pdf**

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  
6 Bladen Street, Room 163  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3114  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3114  
Mary.Lehman@house.maryland.gov

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB53 - CRIMINAL LAW – NONDOMESTICATED ANIMAL PROHIBITIONS – ALTERATIONS**  
**MARCH 25, 2026**  
**FAVORABLE**

CHAIR SMITH, VICE CHAIR WALDSTREICHER, AND MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE:

THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO PRESENT HOUSE BILL 53. HB53 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. HB53 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. HB53 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.

HB53 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, ZOO NOTIC 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**

HB53 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, HB53 ENSURES THESE SPECIES ARE KEPT ONLY BY LICENSED FACILITIES SUBJECT TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE FEDERAL ANIMAL WELFARE ACT. HB53 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.

####

# **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 Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee**

**March 20, 2026**

**Dear Honorable Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstriecker, 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

# **HB53 Humane World FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Stacey Volodin

Position: FAV



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

1255 23<sup>rd</sup> St. NW, Suite 450  
Washington, DC 20037  
202-452-1100  
humaneworld.org

**March 25, 2026**

**Judicial Proceedings Committee  
HB 53 Nondomesticated Animal Prohibitions – Alterations  
FAVORABLE**

On behalf of Humane World for Animals and our supporters across 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, targeted expansion of that framework.

Current Maryland law contains, and this bill continues to provide, generous exceptions for licensed facilities and others to continue to own and maintain these animals. These include an exception for animal exhibitors maintaining a USDA Class C license, those whose business involves the showing or displaying of animals to the public. The bill grandfathers existing private owners who possess covered species prior to the bill's effective date, allowing them to keep those animals under current ownership. However, it prevents future acquisition, breeding, and sale by private individuals, unless permitted under one of the exemptions under existing law.

The goal of HB 53 is to responsibly end the proliferation of these wild animals in private, unqualified homes, where owners often lack the experience, facilities, and oversight necessary to safely and humanely care for them.

**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



1255 23<sup>rd</sup> St. NW, Suite 450  
Washington, DC 20037  
202-452-1100  
humaneworld.org

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

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 kangaroos, 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. 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> 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](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>

<sup>2</sup> 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>



1255 23<sup>rd</sup> St. NW, Suite 450  
Washington, DC 20037  
202-452-1100  
humaneworld.org

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

Private possession and commercial breeding of wild animals is not “conservation.” Genuine conservation is aimed at species recovery in the wild, addressing habitat loss and other threats. When breeding is used for conservation purposes, it is done through coordinated, science-based programs designed to support reintroduction and long-term genetic health, not to supply the pet trade.

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 also affect humans).

Zebras are not raised or kept for human consumption, for riding, or for draft power or farm labor, and breeding them for sale and commercial trade dangerously increases the population held in private hands. More so than domesticated equids, zebras are [susceptible to capture myopathy](#), a stress-induced disease that can result in severe muscle damage or death when they experience extreme fear or struggle, especially during capture, restraint, transport, or handling. Zebras’ extreme stress response [was shaped by their evolution in environments with many, large predatory species](#).

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](mailto: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><b>August 7, 2019/New Braunfels, Texas:</b> 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><b>March 27, 2019/Callahan, Florida:</b> 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><b>April 2015/Muskogee, Oklahoma:</b> 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><b>March 15, 2015/Searcy, Arkansas:</b> 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><b>November 28, 2012/Staten Island, New York:</b> 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><b>February 18, 2024/Texarkana, Texas:</b> 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><b>February 8, 2024/Tampa, Florida:</b> 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><b>February 7, 2024/Harrogate, Tennessee:</b> 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><b>February 8, 2024/Tampa, Florida:</b> 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><b>December 2023/Fresno, California:</b> 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><b>August 19, 2023/Brooklyn, New York:</b> 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><b>July 25, 2023/Grantsville, Utah:</b> 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 &amp; 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><b>July 5, 2023/Blanchard, Oklahoma:</b> 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><b>March 30, 2023/Sparta, Tennessee:</b> 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><b>February 14, 2023/Granbury, Texas:</b> 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><b>October 23, 2022/Carroll County, Indiana:</b> 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><b>September 27, 2022/Temperance, Michigan:</b> 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><b>September 22, 2022/Fort Worth, Texas:</b> 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><b>September 19, 2022/Adams County, Pennsylvania:</b> 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><b>August 8, 2022/Brewster, Ohio:</b> 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><b>July 11, 2022/Gastonia, North Carolina:</b> 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><b>December 2, 2020/Peru, Illinois:</b> 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><b>September 27, 2018/Littleton, Colorado:</b> 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 &amp; Environmental Epidemiology Division, SeaQuest Injury Reporting Form, September 27, 2018.</p>
<p><b>May 6, 2017/Huntsville, Alabama:</b> 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 - <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_bIAYaEN8s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_bIAYaEN8s</a></p>
<p><b>October 17, 2015/Staten Island, New York:</b> 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>

# **MD HB53\_SUPPORT\_GlobalFederationAnimalSanctuaries.**

Uploaded by: Valerie Taylor

Position: FAV



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,

Valerie Taylor, Executive Director  
Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries  
620-309-8637  
[valerie@sanctuaryfederation.org](mailto:valerie@sanctuaryfederation.org)

## **HB53**

Uploaded by: Alison Martini

Position: UNF

Marymont Animal Hospital, Inc  
24 Randolph Road  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20904  
301-384-1223

Dear Senator Will Smith,

Cc: Senators Nick Charles, Jeff Waldstreicher, William Folden, Shaneka Henson, Mary Dulaney James, Sara Love, Michael McKay, Anthony Muse, Charles Sydnor and Christopher West

I am writing to express my strong opposition to Maryland House Bill 53, which proposes adding kangaroos, wallabies, wallaroos and zebras to Maryland's list of prohibited nondomesticated species.

While I understand that the intent of this legislation may be to promote public safety and animal welfare, I am concerned that a blanket prohibition fails to recognize the difference between irresponsible ownership and responsible, regulated animal care. Many individuals and professionals who keep macropods do so with extensive knowledge, proper facilities and veterinary oversight.

I have been a veterinarian in Maryland for almost 30 years and have worked with macropods for over 10 years – I see them in my practice and visit USDA educational facilities for macropod farm calls. I am also on the scientific board of the non-profit ECSM – The Education and Conservation Society of Macropodidae. What most people in this country are not aware of is the crisis these animals are currently experiencing in Australia – the government sanctions harvesting and culling of macropods in the most inhumane ways imaginable – as a result, there are several species that have gone extinct and several others that are threatened. Direct exposure to animals plays a critical role in conservation awareness. As a veterinarian working with macropods, I have seen firsthand how meaningful in-person encounters with animals inspire people to care about wildlife and conservation in ways that books or media alone cannot replicate.

All my macropod clients responsibly maintain these animals and do so with significant experience and dedication to their health and well-being. Of all the many species I work with (including cats, dogs, pocket pets, horses and ruminants), macropods are the most sensitive and gentle animals I have ever worked with. As we all can recognize, any animal that feels scared or threatened will try to protect itself, but macropods would rather run

than fight- they have a well-developed, immediate FLIGHT response! I see significantly more issues on a consistent basis with domestic dogs running rampant and attacking other animals and human beings.

I respectfully urge you to oppose House Bill 53 or consider amendments that allow for responsible, regulated care of macropod species in Maryland.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Alison Martini, DVM

Silver Spring, Maryland

Marymont Animal Hospital, Inc.

[info@marymontah.com](mailto:info@marymontah.com)

## **HB53**

Uploaded by: Mike Toney

Position: UNF

March 22, 2026

To: Senate Judiciary Committee

RE: HB 53 Criminal Law-Nondomesticated animal prohibitions – Alterations

Position: Opposed

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

My name is Mike Toney,

My wife Valerie and I have been raising Macropod's since 2008 for the purpose of enriching the lives of less fortunate people. We provide the most amazing opportunity. They are able hold a joey in their arms and learn just how amazing they are. We are blessed to watch the world of that individual change. Whatever difficulties they are dealing with, that life has handed them washes away. Some have critical medical issues, some have special needs and then there are the forgotten, our Veterans. You can see the awe in their eyes often filled with tears of pure Mother Nature, given joy.

In 2025 we were invited to join Beau Peberdy, a well-respected wildlife rescuer in Australia. We accompanied him for four weeks, traveling the country learning about Macropods from different Australian Wildlife Rehabbers, not only to learn but bridge the gap of Americans and Australians

The goal was to gain every possible bit of knowledge we could about responsible raising and the care giving of Macropods. Our journey included learning how to triage kangaroos hit and killed by vehicles, leaving behind a joey that would need to be cared for.

April 16, 2025 we arrived at The Baptist Cancer Center in Dyersburg Tennessee for a surprise visit to Dawn Chalk while she was receiving her last Chemo therapy. We brought along 2 joeys for the visit. Before leaving the facility we saw well over 100 people. One elderly lady was quoted as saying “This is the best day of my life” after holding a Joey for a few minutes. This was a life changing moment for her. The floor nurses said “this is the most Smiles they have ever seen during chemo treatments” The atmosphere was filled with hope and excitement.

December 18, 2025. Two kangaroo joeys, JennyRoux and Joy were invited and arrived at the OLOL Children’s hospital Baton Rouge LA to visit the patients during their hospital visit. We witnessed so many smiles from everyone including patients, doctors and nurses alike. One child refused to go to family therapy but after hearing that Joy and Jenny, the two kangaroo joeys, were planning a surprise visit she told her dad “Did you write that day and time down?”

February 6, 2026 .Joy and Jenny once again were invited to visit Louisiana Veterans Home in Jackson Louisiana...Countless veterans had the chance to hold and learn about Macropod husbandry while having their picture taken and each given a honorary coin THANKING them for their service. The smiles were enough appreciation from each Veteran without adding that their personal stories were amazing that we got to hear.

March 6, 2026 Joy and Pocahontas a new joey added to our mob (definition of a group of Macropods) went to visit Mrs Boudreaux's Special Needs class, West Feliciana Middle School, St Francisville LA. The teachers were so excited because one of the students interaction with the joey had never seen before. She came out of her comfort zone and was buzzing with excitement.

March 24, 2026 Joy Diamond and Pocahontas kangaroo joeys from our mob is going to the Woodleigh Rehabilitation Nursing Facility of Baton Rouge to bring Smiles, hope and a little bit of once in a life time encounter and education.

In closing my wife and I are affiliated with the Dream Day Foundation ...this is a non profit organization that supports St Jude patients and families and has been established now for 32 years and counting. We have seen first hand

what a kangaroo and wallaby joey including grown adults can do for the soul. Mainly, families come to visits our farm to interact with our kangaroos wallabies and whitetail deer. We also are very active with events hosted by the Dream Day Foundation providing kangaroo joeys ,older kangaroos and wallaby's for everyone to see, hold, touch and educate them with lots of true factual information, not hearsay or inadequate plain false accusations. One of my favorite sayings is "Social Media is our BIGGEST enemy! Please do your research, ask questions, go for yourself and see what a BEAUTIFUL animal all macropods truly are." The experience is unbelievable and most rewarding! And any owner or facility will gladly welcome you to see learn and APPRECIATE.

THIS is just a small sample of what would never happen without the private ownership of Macropods.

I appreciate your time and am available for any questions.

Sincerely Michael Toney  
225-328-2058













**All** Photos Reels More ▾

 **Our Lady of the Lake Children's H...** ...  
Jan 2 · 🌐

A little hop of joy made its way through **FMOL Health** | Our Lady of the Lake Children's Hospital 🐰

Thanks to Mike and Valerie Toney and the **Dream Day Foundation**, some of our patients and team members experienced a special visit that brought smiles, laughter and a moment of wonder to their day.







# **TESTIMONY OPPOSING MD HB53.pdf**

Uploaded by: Mindy Patterson

Position: UNF



March 23, 2026

**Subject: Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 53**

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Mindy Patterson, and I am the President and Co-Founder of The Cavalry Group, a national member-based organization dedicated to protecting the constitutional and private property rights of law-abiding animal owners, breeders, exhibitors, and agricultural professionals across the United States. I submit this testimony on behalf of our members in Maryland in strong opposition to House Bill 53, and respectfully urge this Committee to give the bill an unfavorable report.

House Bill 53 seeks to expand criminal prohibitions on the ownership of certain species, including kangaroos, wallabies, wallaroos, and zebras, under the premise of protecting public safety. However, there is no documented evidence in Maryland demonstrating that these animals pose a threat to public safety. The animals identified in this bill have not been involved in incidents that would justify such sweeping restrictions.

Public policy, particularly when it involves criminal prohibitions, should be grounded in evidence and necessity. In this case, the justification for HB53 rests on hypothetical concerns rather than documented incidents. Maryland already has laws in place that allow authorities to address legitimate issues involving animal welfare or public safety when they arise. Expanding prohibitions without a demonstrated need is unnecessary and excessive.

Equally concerning is the precedent this bill sets. HB53 moves Maryland toward banning the ownership of animals not because they have caused harm, but because they are perceived as capable of doing so. If the standard for prohibition becomes theoretical risk rather than documented concern, it opens the door for future restrictions on additional species that are responsibly and safely managed today.



The bill's exemption for USDA-licensed facilities raises further practical and ethical concerns. Many responsible animal owners and exhibitors maintain USDA licenses and operate under federal oversight. However, circumstances change. If a license is relinquished, expires, or is no longer required for a particular operation, the owner could suddenly find themselves in violation of state law, despite having lawfully and responsibly cared for their kangaroos, wallabies, wallaroos, and/or zebras.

This creates a situation where animals themselves are placed at risk. Owners could be forced into untenable decisions regarding the future of their animals that have been properly cared for, not because of misconduct, but because of a change in licensing status. Legislation that claims to promote public safety should not inadvertently create instability for animals in responsible and dedicated care.

The focus of public policy should be on responsible ownership and enforcement of existing laws, not broad prohibitions that penalize compliant individuals. The Cavalry Group represents members who are deeply committed to animal welfare, regulatory compliance, and public safety. These are not individuals operating outside the law. They are conscientious stewards who should not be subject to unnecessary criminal restrictions.

In closing, the premise of HB53 is fundamentally flawed. The claim that this legislation is necessary to protect public safety is not supported by evidence. Without a demonstrated problem, expanding criminal prohibitions is neither justified nor sensible.

For these reasons, and on behalf of our members in Maryland, I respectfully urge the Committee to give House Bill 53 an unfavorable vote.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Mindy Patterson  
President & Co-Founder  
The Cavalry Group, LLC

# **kangaroo4.pdf**

Uploaded by: Patrick McSweeney

Position: UNF

## **Testamentary Statement**

**Dr. Patrick McSweeney, DVM**

Regarding Kangaroos, Wallabies, and Wallaroos (Macropods)

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dr. Patrick McSweeney. I am a practicing veterinarian with 42 years of clinical experience. I am a member of the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Louisiana Veterinary Medical Association, the Southeast Louisiana Veterinary Association, the Zoological Association of America, the American Association of Zoo Veterinarians, and the Florida Parishes Veterinary Medical Association.

I am commissioned by the state of Louisiana to represent animals in court, where I evaluate and determine cases involving animal welfare and abuse. I am an animal rights veterinarian.

I am writing to provide professional testimony regarding kangaroos, wallabies, and wallaroos, collectively known as macropods, and to address whether these animals should be considered dangerous animals from a public safety standpoint.

I am a frontline veterinarian who works directly with kangaroos and other macropods. My opinions are based on hands-on clinical treatment, anesthesia, surgery, medical management, and daily husbandry of these animals. I also teach kangaroo medicine, husbandry, nutrition, handling, restraint, and general care to animal owners and caretakers. My perspective is based on real-world experience working with these animals, not theory or anecdotal reports.

In addition to my veterinary background, I have also been involved in legal matters affecting veterinary medicine and animal welfare. In the case **McSweeney v Louisiana Board of Veterinary Medicine**, I put my veterinary license on the line to ensure that animal shelters could legally operate veterinary hospitals and provide medical care to animals in need, and I ultimately prevailed before the Louisiana Supreme Court., and that legal precedent stands to this day. I mention this to demonstrate that I am willing to stand behind my professional opinions and accept responsibility for them when animal welfare and public policy are involved.

From a behavioral and biological standpoint, kangaroos are prey animals, not predators. Their natural instinct is to flee, not attack. In my professional experience, the rare instances of aggression that do occur are almost always associated with fear, improper handling, territorial behavior in intact males, or animals that have been abused or mishandled. This is true of many species, including horses, cattle, deer, and dogs.

It is important to evaluate risk based on actual behavior patterns and documented injury statistics, not perception or unfamiliarity. Many animals that are commonly owned or encountered in everyday life pose a far greater statistical risk of injury than kangaroos. Dogs are responsible for thousands of injuries and multiple human fatalities every year in the United States. Yet dogs are not banned.

People often say that their pit bull is the nicest dog they have ever owned. What they are really saying is that sometimes you find a good one within a group that may have a reputation for aggression. With kangaroos, the opposite is true. Most kangaroos are calm, predictable, non-aggressive animals with very few exceptions. The overwhelming majority of properly raised and properly managed kangaroos are not aggressive animals and do not pose a threat to the public.

It is also important to keep animal behavior in perspective by comparing kangaroos to other animals that are commonly owned or legally maintained. Many horses bite and kick, and horses are responsible for thousands of emergency room visits every year in the United States. Despite this, horses are not considered dangerous animals under the law.

Zebras, which are closely related to horses, are significantly more aggressive than domestic horses. Anyone who has worked with zebras knows that zebras bite and kick and are extremely difficult to handle. Zebras are essentially untamed horses and are far more dangerous to handle than domestic horses. Interestingly, zebras are actually black animals with white stripes, not white animals with black stripes, which is simply a reminder that perception is often different from reality.

Similarly, mustang horses are wild horses. They are not domesticated in the traditional sense, and they can be unpredictable and dangerous until properly trained. However, mustangs are not banned animals. The law recognizes that behavior depends largely on handling, training, and management rather than simply the species itself.

This comparison is important because it demonstrates that the law traditionally regulates ownership based on management and responsibility, not simply the species of the animal. If we classified animals as dangerous based solely on size, strength, or the ability to injure someone, then horses, cattle, zebras, bison, elk, and many other animals would all be classified as dangerous animals. That is not how animal regulation has historically been handled, and for good reason.

The comparison can be summarized simply:

Dogs injure people every year, yet they are not banned.

Horses injure people every year, yet they are not banned.

Zebras are more aggressive than horses, yet they are not banned.

Mustangs are wild and unpredictable, yet they are not banned.

Kangaroos are prey animals and are typically calm and non-aggressive, and therefore should not be classified as dangerous animals.

Public policy and legislation should be based on actual risk, not unfamiliarity with an animal or hypothetical risk. The legislative intent of any law regulating animals should be to protect public health, safety, and welfare. In my professional opinion, responsible ownership and proper management of kangaroos does not conflict with that legislative intent.

Properly managed macropods are typically kept in fenced enclosures, are not roaming animals, are not predators, and do not seek out human interaction in a harmful way. Most injuries

involving kangaroos occur in Australia with wild animals, not captive, human-raised animals under controlled conditions. That distinction is very important. **On the continent of Australia, where macropods outnumber humans, 3 to 1, there have been 2 reported deaths from direct interaction with macropods, exclusive of vehicular wrecks, in 100 years.**

In my professional opinion, classifying kangaroos as dangerous animals is not supported by veterinary science, animal behavior, injury statistics, or practical experience working with these animals. Laws should address irresponsible ownership and improper containment, not classify an entire species as dangerous when the overwhelming majority of those animals are not.

I respectfully ask that you consider the difference between perceived danger and actual risk, and that you consider input from professionals who work directly with these animals.

I appreciate your time and your consideration in this matter. I would be happy to answer any questions regarding kangaroos, wallabies, or wallaroos, including their behavior, medical care, husbandry, and public safety considerations.

One final point: macropods are victims of *Toxoplasma gondii*, not a source of environmental spread. The only way they could spread it is if something eats the macropod. They are an intermediate host. Only cats, large and small, can spread *Toxoplasma gondii* in the environment. This is a well-established scientific fact. Cats are the definitive host of this organism.

Take a moment and click on these hyper-links. You'll learn some fascinating things that you didn't know.

[www.facebook.com/share/r/17FJo1P9Sy/](http://www.facebook.com/share/r/17FJo1P9Sy/)

[www.facebook.com/share/r/1HDoxZwiVB/](http://www.facebook.com/share/r/1HDoxZwiVB/)

Respectfully,

**Dr. Patrick McSweeney, DVM**

Animal Medical and Surgical Hospital

3001 N. Causeway Blvd.

Metairie, Louisiana 70002

LSU-SVM 1984

Louisiana license # 1548

504-296-1232 clr