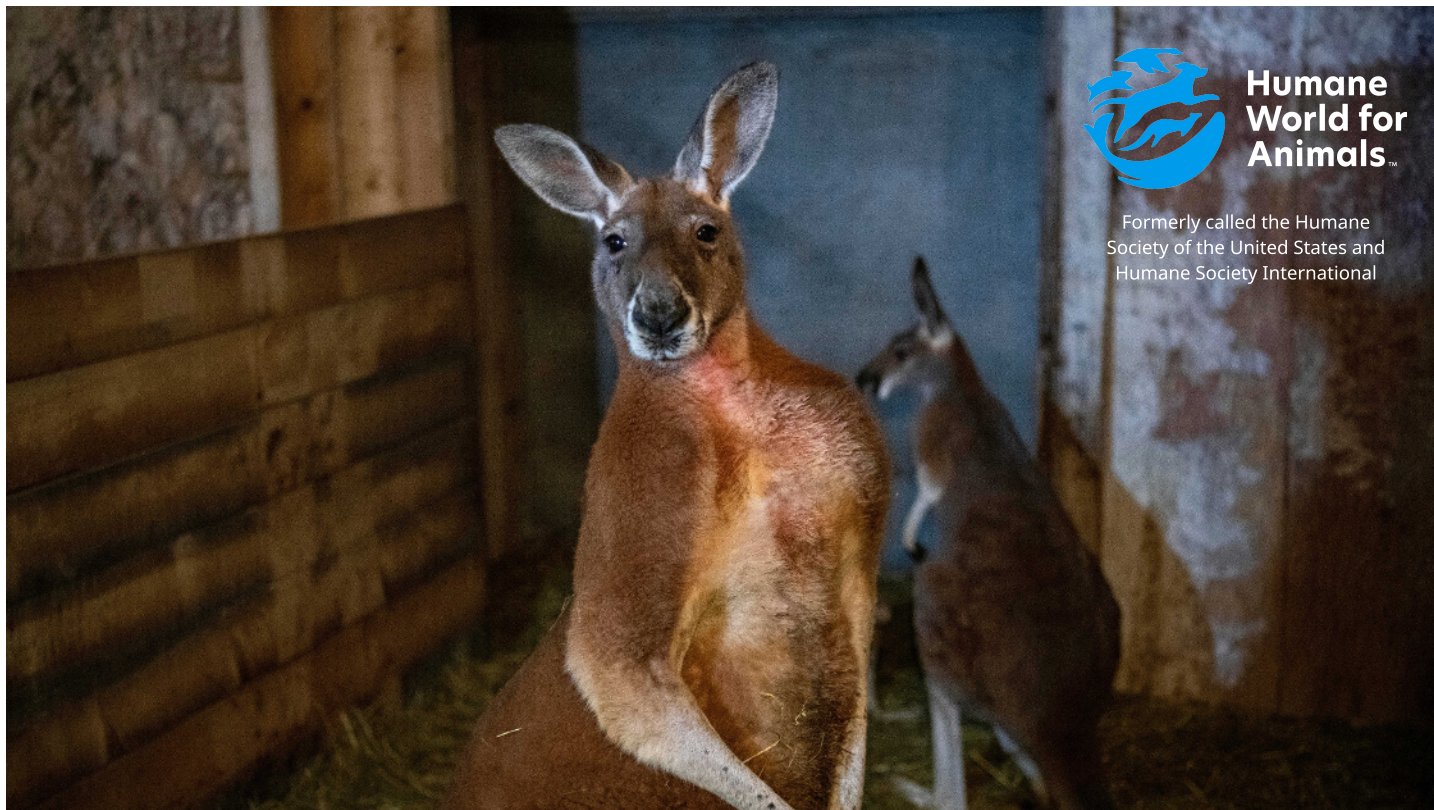




Support HB 53

End private ownership of zebras, kangaroos and wallabies in Maryland

Currently, Maryland prohibits private ownership of a number of wild animals, including bears, nonhuman primates, wild cats, and certain venomous snakes. HB 53 will address public safety and animal welfare concerns by also prohibiting private ownership of zebras and kangaroos and wallabies in Maryland.

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, suffer tremendously in the pet trade, and escapes of these animals are on the rise.

What HB 53 will do

HB 53 will protect public safety and animal welfare by prohibiting private ownership of zebras and macropods in Maryland by amending MD Code, Criminal Law §10-621. HB 53 does not impact licensed animal exhibitors.

Builds on current MD law

The Maryland legislature has already banned private ownership of many wild animals due to public safety risks. Expanding this law to include zebras and macropods will help law enforcement and protect communities. Only licensed, regulated individuals and facilities would be allowed to possess these animals.



Protects public safety

Zebra are wild, non-domesticated animals with unpredictable behavior, including biting and kicking. They are strong, muscular and capable of overpowering people; a zebra's kick can break bones and cause 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. Since 2015, there have been at least 83 kangaroo, wallaby or wallaroo escapes across 25 states, nearly half involving animals kept as pets. In 2025, a man in South Carolina was believed to have been killed by a kangaroo in an enclosure at an unlicensed petting zoo.

Protects animal welfare

Zebras frequently escape due to their strong flight response and wariness, creating prolonged and risky search efforts. In 2021, a zebra escaped from a truck parked at a live animal auction in Tennessee. 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. In another case, neighbors watched as a man shot and killed his pet zebra, who had escaped and darted into a nearby



field after apparently being startled by police cars.

Wallabies and kangaroos are widely sold by breeders, dealers, and exotic animal auctions, suffering significant welfare harms throughout the trade. Joeys are prematurely taken from their mothers—well before the natural weaning age—leading to long-term psychological and physical harm. Kangaroos require specialized diets and are prone to serious captive-care issues including:

- Lumpy jaw: a highly contagious, often fatal bacterial infection linked to stress, overcrowding, poor hygiene, and cold climates.
- Gastrointestinal blockages, injuries from collisions with walls/furniture, attacks from predators, salmonellosis, obesity, and pneumonia.
- Fatal toxoplasmosis outbreaks, which can also infect humans.

Lack of regulation

Unlike licensed facilities, which are subject to the requirements of the federal Animal Welfare Act, private owners are unregulated and uninspected, allowing untold numbers of wild animals to suffer in substandard conditions. Due to the lack of regulation, it is currently unknown how many zebras and macropods are kept as pets in Maryland.

Maryland zebra escape

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.



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