

*The Nation's First
Elephant Sanctuary*



PAWS
PERFORMING ANIMAL
WELFARE SOCIETY

Founded in 1984
P R O T E C T I O N
E D U C A T I O N
A D V O C A C Y
S A N C T U A R Y
pawsweb.org

April 3, 2017

Councilmember David Ryu
Los Angeles City Hall
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Support for Ordinance to Ban the Use of Wild Animals for Entertainment

Dear Councilmember Ryu:

On behalf of the Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) and our many supporters in Los Angeles, I am writing to support a ban on the use of wild or exotic animals for entertainment in Los Angeles, including the exhibition of these animals in public areas and at private events.

PAWS was formed in 1984 to rescue and care for abused, neglected or retired wild animals, many from the entertainment industry. We operate three captive wildlife sanctuaries in California, including ARK 2000, a 2,300-acre natural habitat refuge where we care for elephants, bears and big cats.

PAWS is widely recognized for its expertise in the care and management of captive wildlife. I serve on the Director's Advisory Committee on the Humane Care and Treatment of Wild Animals for the California Department of Fish & Wildlife, and the Advisory Committee for the Detroit Zoological Society's Center for Zoo Animal Welfare. I formerly worked with trained wild animals in the entertainment industry, doing film, television and live appearances. Since then, I have trained and managed captive exotic and wild animals for over 30 years.

Wild animals exhibited at circuses, traveling shows, private parties and other events create a serious threat to human safety as they typically are in dangerously close proximity to or in direct contact with the public. At our sanctuary, we do not allow the public to be in contact with any of the animals because of the threat they pose. Even when born in captivity and hand-raised, wild animals retain their natural instincts, making them dangerous and unpredictable. There have been numerous instances of animal escapes and attacks, resulting in grave injuries and deaths. Big cats alone have been involved in more than 350 dangerous incidents in the U.S. since 1990, leaving at least 18 adults and two children dead and scores of others injured.

In the event of an animal escape, first responders are often local law enforcement, which may be called on to destroy an animal if human safety is immediately endangered. Use of a tranquilizer dart is usually not considered to be an option in these cases. According to a 2012 report to the Los Angeles Board of Animal Services Commissioners, LAPD officials have expressed concerns regarding the presence of exotic and wild animals in proximity to humans, both in and outside of performances.¹ There also is the potential for legal action against the city, should an injury or death occur.



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Based on decades of experience, I have concluded that it is impossible for a wild animal to live a healthy, normal life while traveling and performing. Insurmountable compromises to animal welfare include extended travel; confinement in cramped pens, cages and semi trucks; chaining; sterile environments; improper substrates; and inadequate or improper social groupings – all of which can compromise health and lower life expectancy. Trainers utilize cruel training methods, including beatings and electric shock, to force animals to perform and keep them under strict control. Tools of the trade include electric prods, goads, whips and chains. The most severe abuses occur during training sessions, yet no agency, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture which oversees the welfare of exhibited animals, monitors animals during these sessions.

At the PAWS sanctuary, we have personally witnessed the long-term effects of travel, training and performing on wild animals. Fear of punishment was clearly evident in the elephants who had been trained with the bullhook (the use of which is now banned in Los Angeles). When they first arrived at the sanctuary, these elephants would flinch or cower if you so much as moved your arm too quickly, expecting to be reprimanded with a swift jab or hit. Lions who had performed in circuses were hyper-aggressive, compared to lions who had come from other backgrounds.

Animal performances in circuses and traveling exhibitions do not educate the public or aid conservation efforts. They distort the public's understanding of wild animals and mislead people into believing that the animals are living an acceptable life when evidence for the opposite is overwhelming. Research has found that when the public sees a wild animal in an entertainment context it can actually hamper conservation efforts.

The public is increasingly troubled by the use of wild animals for entertainment, as evidenced by a 2015 Gallup poll that found 69% of Americans are concerned about wild animals in circuses. This concern has led the states of California and Rhode Island, and more than 125 jurisdictions in the U.S., to enact restrictions affecting the use of wild animals in traveling shows, including at least 16 other cities and counties in California. Many other municipalities across the U.S. are considering similar measures.

There is an abundance of family-friendly entertainment choices in Los Angeles that do not involve wild animal performances. The proposed ordinance ensures that citizens will remain safe and shields wild animals from the abuse inherent in traveling exhibitions and shows.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue. PAWS stands ready to assist you in any way we can.

Sincerely,



Ed Stewart
President and Co-founder, PAWS

¹ Report to the Board of Animal Services Commissioners, Use of Exotic and Wild Animals, and/or Elephants, in Performances by Traveling Shows Within the City of Los Angeles. October 18, 2012.