



February 4, 2015
Senate Natural Resources Committee

Chair Powell and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony today regarding dangerous regulated animals in Kansas. My name is Midge Grinstead and I am the state director for The Humane Society of the United States. On behalf of HSUS and our supporters in Kansas, I urge the committee to oppose Senate Bill 97.

In 2005, after a high school student was killed while having her senior pictures taken with a tiger, Kansas legislators moved quickly to pass a bill to prevent a similar incident from ever happening again. The resulting legislation essentially banned the private ownership of big cats, bears, and non-native venomous snakes, and prohibited public handling of these animals. That was an important and necessary first step in addressing the serious issue of private ownership of dangerous wild animals in our state. SB97 on the other hand, will negatively impact animal welfare, put an unsuspecting public at risk for unnecessary harm, and reverse the progressive stance that Kansas has demonstrated on this issue.

Wild animals retain their basic instincts, even if they are captive born and hand raised. These animals can and have caused numerous deaths and many serious injuries. Individuals and unaccredited entities simply do not have the knowledge, experience, or resources to safely house and meet the specialized needs of wild animals. As a result, individuals and communities are put at unnecessary risk.

Even young big cats, bears, and primates have sharp teeth and claws that can inflict serious injury. Wild animals can transmit diseases to people. Primates can spread dangerous viral, bacterial, fungal, and parasitic infections, including the deadly herpes B virus.

Emergency responders, such as law enforcement, firefighters, paramedics, animal control officers and animal disaster response teams are put in danger when faced with dangerous wild animals who have escaped and/or attacked. And taxpayers, as well as the sanctuary community, are footing the bill to deal with the problems that inevitably arise when dangerous wild animals are kept in private hands.

Baby animals who are used for public photo and play sessions are typically taken from their mothers at birth and are subjected to excessive handling, physical discipline, interrupted rest, and improper nutrition. At just a few months of age they are often discarded, with some ending up warehoused at poorly run roadside zoos and pseudo-sanctuaries or in the hands of unqualified people with private menageries. Some animals used temporarily for public handling, such as black bears and African lions, may even be slaughtered for the exotic meat market. More babies must be continually produced to perpetuate this lucrative business. The cycle of breeding, exploiting, and then dumping baby animals after a few months fuels the exotic pet trade, puts animals at risk, endangers the public, and creates a burden for both law enforcement and sanctuaries.

Finally, allowing the public to handle dangerous wild animals negatively impacts true conservation efforts. People who handle pet or play with exotic animals are inspired to acquire wild animals as pets. The public is also left with the dangerous and inaccurate perception that deadly predators who are captive-bred and hand-reared will grow into docile, friendly animals. And studies confirm that seeing humans interact with endangered animals leads people to falsely believe that these animals are not threatened or endangered in the wild.

I respectfully urge this committee to put the safety of the public first by opposing SB 97.

Thank you,

Midge Grinstead, State Director – The Humane Society of the United States