



January 28th, 2015

Dear Chairman Larry Powell & Members of the Committee;

I am writing this letter in strong support of Senate Bill 97.

The Nashville Zoo has a long history of breeding Clouded Leopards both in the United States and in Thailand where we maintain the largest collection of these endangered cats in the world. For over a decade there was not a single cub born in North America and the exact same scenario was true the World over until the Nashville Zoo, along with Smithsonian's National Zoo, began having great success in a cooperative breeding program with the Zoological Park Organization in Thailand. This species is arguably the most difficult feline to breed in captivity due to their nervous behavior and sexual incompatibility which often results in the males killing the females. The sole reason for this huge success, in contrast to decades of historical worldwide failure, is attributed to hand rearing and heavily socializing cubs within the first few weeks after birth. This intense socialization of cubs has all but eliminated conspecific aggression and birth rates are at an all-time high and mortality rates have dropped dramatically. In the past several years bonded clouded leopard pairs which have been formed from these socialized cubs have resulted in 100% reproduction which has never occurred before.

There is absolutely no denying that hand reared cubs and appropriately socialized Clouded Leopards breed better as well as make much better exhibit animals because of scientifically proven stress reduction. The success level is so concrete that the Clouded Leopard Species Survival Program (SSP), which is managed by AZA, formally adopted hand rearing as the preferred method of management. It has also been proven that successful cheetah reproduction has shown similar results.

Our Zoo, as well as countless other accredited facilities, utilize these hand reared offspring as Ambassador Animals. There is no equivalent educational tool in engaging the general public about the plight of endangered felines then allowing a personal experience with these amazing animals. This is clearly apparent as many of the top Zoos in the Country including the San Diego, Cincinnati, Houston, Miami and Columbus Zoo's all utilize clouded leopards, cheetahs and other easily managed cats as a major component of their educational and conservation messaging. The current Kansas restrictions prohibit professional accredited facilities from utilizing these cats to educate their visiting public and raise awareness of their conservation needs. Further it does not allow the Tanganyika Wildlife Park, who

maintains the largest collection of Clouded Leopards in the country, from SSP preferred husbandry standards.

I have been working with the Tanganyika Wildlife Park for many years and find this facility to have the very highest standards and ethics. The park maintains some of the most genetically valuable specimens and their breeding success is important to the entire world wide population.

I strongly encourage the Committee to allow AZA and ZAA accredited facilities to mirror what so many Zoos across the country do as a normal and preferred part of their mission. There is simply no doubt that visitors will become more engaged with the conservation of these species and their ecosystems with the exposure the bill will create. I strongly encourage you to support Senate Bill 97.

Sincerely,



Rick Schwartz

President and CEO

Nashville Zoo