



April 2, 2019

On behalf of our members and supporters nationwide, we write in support of the Big Cat Public Safety Act, H.R. 1380, introduced by Representatives Mike Quigley (D-IL) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA). The Big Cat Public Safety Act strengthens existing law to prohibit the possession of tigers, leopards, lions, and other big cat species by private individuals, and also outlaws public contact for commercial purposes (such as cub petting and photo ops) that is supported by and drives the unscientific and unethical breeding and interstate trade of big cats in the United States. We believe that this breeding results in a significant untraceable population of big cats that presents serious animal welfare and conservation issues, as well as a danger to the public and first responders.

This industry in big cat breeding and exploitation in the U.S. is also problematic for the State Department and other agencies in their efforts to advocate for an end to notorious tiger farming and trafficking in Asia, and to promote the conservation of big cat species in the wild. Because, at present, no one government agency tracks U.S. big cats, identifies their owners, or ensures the proper disposition of their valuable parts when they die, tigers and/or their parts are susceptible to an illegal trade that further stimulates demand and poaching of wild tigers. This hinders the U.S. government's ability to lead and advocate for international efforts to stem trafficking of big cats and their parts and products.

Congress already demonstrated unanimous concern about this issue. In 2003, Congress recognized the danger big cats can pose to public safety and passed the Captive Wildlife Safety Act (CWSA) to place restrictions on the import, export, purchase, sale, transport, receipt, or acquisition of big cats across state lines or the U.S. border. The CWSA passed by unanimous consent in the Senate and by a vote of 419-0 in the House.

The Big Cat Public Safety Act closes loopholes in the CWSA by prohibiting “pet” big cat ownership as well as curbing abuse of cubs in photo-op, petting, walk-with, swim-with and other exploitative commercial operations, as needed to effectively regulate domestic trade in and significantly reduce the population of untracked big cats in the U.S. The bill would result in the following important, positive outcomes:

- **Public Safety:** Since 1990, there have been nearly 380 dangerous incidents involving captive big cats in 46 states and the District of Columbia. Big cats took the lives of five children and caused serious injuries to others, including lost limbs and other traumatic injuries. Captive big cats also killed 20 adults, and mauled scores of others.
- **Law Enforcement:** Captive big cats present a serious threat to the first responders and other members of law enforcement who have so often put their lives at risk to protect the public from the consequences of keeping big cats as pets. **The National Sheriffs’ Association is just one major endorser of this legislation** (see **attached NSA Resolution 2016-04**).
- **Animal Welfare:** Cubs used for petting and photo ops are typically torn from their mothers at birth to be roughly handled by the public, at great risk to their underdeveloped immune systems. After a few months, when they are too big to be handled, many captive big cats are left to languish in grossly deficient conditions, living in cramped and flimsy cages with almost complete inattention to their behavioral and psychological needs.
- **Conservation and Anti-Trafficking:** The large number of big cats in the U.S. and the inability of existing U.S. regulation to ensure their security leaves them open to exploitation in international illegal wildlife trade. Trafficking in big cat parts and products is a primary threat to the survival of many of these species in the wild – most notably tigers. Given the broad bipartisan support for addressing international wildlife trafficking and the significant U.S. investment in tackling the transnational organized criminal syndicates behind this trade, we must ensure that we are not contributing to the problem.

The Big Cat Public Safety Act includes appropriate exemptions for sanctuaries, universities, and professionally run zoos as indicated by the endorsement from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Current private owners are grandfathered-in and are simply required to register their animals with the government to ensure that first responders and animal control officers are aware of the presence of such animals in their communities. The only “zoos” adversely affected by the legislation are not zoos at all, but rather, unscrupulous commercial operators for whom public contact with big

cats is a business model.

We urge Congress to pass the Big Cat Public Safety Act to bring us significantly closer to the end of chronic animal welfare and human safety threats associated with the commercial exploitation of big cats.

Sincerely,

Dan Ashe
President & CEO
Association of Zoos and Aquariums

Cathy Liss
President
Animal Welfare Institute

Ron Forman
President and CEO
Audubon Nature Institute

Carole Baskin
Founder & CEO
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U.S. Country Director
International Fund for Animal Welfare

Jack Mulvena
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Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens

Ginette Hemley
Senior Vice-President, Wildlife Conservation
WWF US



NSA Resolution 2016-04

NATIONAL SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION SUPPORTS THE BIG CAT PUBLIC SAFETY ACT

WHEREAS, the nation's sheriffs, the highest constitutional law enforcement officers in many counties throughout the nation, should not be confronted with dangerous big cats kept in unsafe and abusive circumstances as domestic pets in the United States; and

WHEREAS, tigers, lions and other exotic "Big Cats" who are kept in people's homes and backyards as domestic pets pose a serious and completely unnecessary risk to public safety, law enforcement and first responders; and

WHEREAS, Sheriffs/Deputy Sheriffs should not be exposed to response to extremely high risk incidents when private owners are not able to control and manage their dangerous big cats. Many of these big cats are frequently housed in dilapidated cages that are unlikely to hold and contain them during natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes and tornadoes; and

WHEREAS, an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 big cats are owned as pets or maintained in ill-equipped roadside zoos and traveling exhibits in the United States. Since 1990, there have been over 740 dangerous incidents in America involving big cats – tigers, lions, cougars in which 5 children and 16 adults have been killed and scores of people have been mauled.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the National Sheriffs' Association recognizes that the private ownership of big cats in America is a serious public safety problem which requires the passage of the "Big Cat Public Safety Act" to ensure big cats only live in secure facilities that can properly provide for them and do not diminish public safety.

Approved by the Board of Directors of the National Sheriffs' Association who have now Amended & Restated NSA Resolution 2016-04, on June 25, 2016 at the Annual Conference of the National Sheriffs' Association, Minneapolis, Minnesota. This resolution to remain in effect until June 26, 2020, in accordance with Article XIII, Section 6 of the Constitution and Bylaws of the National Sheriffs Association.