

Muskingum County Sheriff's Office

Matthew J. Lutz, Sheriff

www.ohiomuskingumsheriff.org



Dear Members of Congress:

On behalf of the Muskingum County Sheriff's Office, I am writing today to urge your co-sponsorship of the Big Cat Public Safety Act (H.R. 1818), and to tell you why I personally support this important legislation.

H.R. 1818 is a common-sense bill that will generally prohibit people from keeping tigers, lions and other big cats as pets and breeding them for commercial exploitation, while requiring current owners to report their big cats. The bill exempts legitimate wildlife sanctuaries, colleges and universities, reputable zoos and traveling circuses in compliance with the Animal Welfare Act.

In late 2011, when private big cat owner Terry Thompson let loose the 38 big cats and other exotics he kept on a farm in Muskingum County, it was up to me to determine what to do. In order to protect my community, I had to make the difficult decision to shoot the animals so they couldn't harm people. This decision, although the right one, brought major adversity to my office and my community. It also placed a heavy burden on our Deputies, some whom still carry that today.

Law enforcement and other first responders don't go through training for this, and taxpayers pay the cost when big cats escape or otherwise jeopardize the community. We have a lot of hunters on our agency, but you're never trained to shoot exotic animals and have to deal with situations like this. Some of our Deputies took quite some time to cope with the situation they were put in. There was also an extra \$8,000 cost to our agency due to the overtime that was needed to cover this situation.

As someone who values public safety, I am concerned that there may be upwards of 10,000 big cats kept in the United States as pets in backyards or in roadside zoos, and that no one, not even the USDA, knows exactly where they are and under what conditions they are living. Meanwhile, captive big cats in the U.S. have killed more than 20 people (including five children) and have been involved with hundreds of other dangerous incidents.

We can't stand on the sideline waiting for the next incident. Please co-sponsor H.R. 1818 today.
Sincerely,

Matthew J. Lutz
Muskingum County Sheriff

1840 East Pike - Zanesville, OH 43701

Communications (740) 452-3637- Jail (740) 455-7133 - Records/Civil (740) 455-7134 - Detectives (740) 455-7135
Dispatch Fax (740) 455-7176 Records Fax (740) 455-7924 Administration Fax (740) 455-7902