**Take 5 Minutes to Speak Up for Captive Big Cats!**


Rep. Buck McKeon (R-CA) and Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-CA) introduced bipartisan H.R. 1998 to prohibit the private possession and breeding of big cats. Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) introduced the Senate companion bill, S. 1381. This crucially important federal bill will insure that lions, tigers and other dangerous big cats – which are kept by the thousands in this country as pets and exploited in roadside zoos and traveling exhibits – do not threaten public safety, diminish global big cat conservation efforts, or end up living in deplorable conditions where they are often subjected to mistreatment and cruelty.

**What The Bill Will Do:**

**Ban Private Possession.** The bill would make it illegal to possess any big cats, except at highly-qualified facilities such as accredited zoos and wildlife sanctuaries where they can be properly cared for and sheltered. It is estimated that private owners in the U.S. currently own 10,000 to 20,000 big cats.

**Ban Breeding.** The bill would also limit the breeding of big cat to accredited zoos and some research or educational institutions.

**Establish Tracking.** The bill would require anyone currently possessing big cats to register them with USDA in order to keep them. Currently no governmental agency knows exactly how many dangerous big cats are in private hands.

**Grandfather Current Owners.** The bill would allow owners to keep their current cats, provided they register the cats with USDA. Owners would not be allowed to ever acquire or breed more cats. Violators of the law could have their cats confiscated and could face stiff penalties including fines up to $20,000 and up to five years in jail.

**Why The Bill Is So Important:**

**The Spark that Lit the Flame.** The debate over private ownership of big cats garnered front-page national media attention in 2011 when the owner of a backyard menagerie in Ohio opened the cages of his tigers, leopards, lions, wolves, bears and monkeys before committing suicide. Local police, who were neither trained nor properly equipped to deal with such a dangerous situation, were forced to shoot and kill nearly 50 animals – 38 of them big cats – before the animals could reach populated areas. For many in America, it was the first time they had considered the deadly consequences of private ownership of big cats. America’s eyes were opened.

**Public Safety Jeopardized.** In the past two decades alone, U.S. incidents involving captive big cats have resulted in 23 human deaths (5 of them children) and an additional 252 people being mauled. During that time 266 big cats escaped their enclosures, 146 big cats were killed and 133 were confiscated.
Cute Cubs Become Dangerous Carnivores. Individuals who buy cubs as pets quickly find they grow up to be dangerous, unmanageable and expensive to feed. The cats often end up in tiny, barren cages in backyards for their entire lives. Some are abandoned to already financially strapped sanctuaries. Others become part of the illegal trade for their bones and skin.

Deplorable Conditions are the Rule. In the case of big cats owned as pets (not exhibited to the public), there is ZERO federal regulation governing how they are kept.

State laws for big cat ownership vary widely from no restrictions, to simply registering them, to bans on ownership. But even bans are mostly ineffective because many states exempt owners who obtain USDA commercial exhibitor licenses. According to a 2010 audit of USDA by the Office of Inspector General, 70% of private owners with 4 or less cats were actually pet owners. They were using USDA registration to evade the state law.

Exhibited Big Cats Endure Minimum Standards. Cats owned by exhibitors do fall under the regulations promulgated by USDA under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA), but they fare no better. The USDA sets minimum standards which allow big cats to spend their entire lives in small chain-link cages with cement floors (in effect prison cells). And even these minimal standards are totally impractical to enforce. USDA has about 100 inspectors to police over 2700 exotic animal exhibitors and thousands of other animal facilities. Horrible facilities are cited year after year. Only a few of the very worst are ever shut down. So the vast majority of big cats live in conditions that any compassionate person would view as cruel and inhumane.

Illegal Trade in Big Cat “Parts” Impacts Wild Cat Conservation. Breeders who profit by selling big cats or exploiting them in exhibits and as pets say that they are helping to conserve the species in the wild. In fact, the opposite is true. For example, of the estimated 5000 tigers in this country, only about 250 are pure bred subspecies (all of those are housed in AZA accredited zoos). All of the rest are considered “generic” tigers – a tiger cross bred between subspecies – and have no conservation value whatsoever.

Undercover operations by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service have demonstrated the illegal trade in big cat parts, including skins and bones. The International Tiger Coalition says bones and skins supplied from the captive big cat population increase the market for these parts. But demand then also grows for the “real” product, i.e. parts from big cats poached in the wild.

YOU can make a difference! ASK Your Senators and House Representative to Co-Sponsor the Big Cats & Public Safety Protection Act (H.R. 1998 and S. 1381). To easily find the phone numbers and email addresses for your lawmakers, go to www.CatLaws.com, click Find Your Lawmakers, enter your zip code, and select your Federal lawmakers. Every call helps!!!

THIS IS THE BILL THAT WILL STOP THE ABUSE –THANK YOU FOR CALLING AND EMAILING!