



Texas Animal Control Association

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RE: HR 263 Big Cat Public Safety Act

To All Federal Legislators from Texas:

As President of The Texas Animal Control Association (TACA), I am writing to express our support for HR 263 commonly called the Big Cat Public Safety Act. TACA is the oldest and largest state agency that advocates on behalf of animal control and welfare personnel in the nation and we represent thousands of animal care and control professionals from all over Texas. As you may know, Texas has one of the highest populations of captive big cats in the country and there are numerous instances where these animals have escaped, injured, and even killed people in our state's recent history. Each of these occurrences necessitates the use of a great deal of public resources to respond to and these costs are bore not by the owners of the animals but rather by taxpayers. Keeping these dangerous wild animals as pets is a public safety issue that must be addressed.

The Animal Control Officers that make up our membership are often on the frontlines for issues that involve big cats being kept by hobbyists despite the fact that we do not have adequate training or equipment to do so. The keeping of these animals outside of licensed facilities and non-commercial sanctuaries is simply a ticking time bomb waiting to go off. I personally have dealt with numerous big cats and other wild predators that were being kept in private homes in my more than 26 years of doing this job. One case in particular that stands out as especially dangerous was when a tiger and a mountain lion were abandoned inside a home by their owner who left them with no food or water. These cats languished for over a week and even ripped up the toilets trying to find more water to quench their thirst. The scariest part of this situation is that the house they were in was next door to a daycare full of preschool children. The only thing that likely prevented a terrible tragedy befalling one of these kids is that the previous owner had painted over the windows to keep anyone from seeing the dangerous wild animals being kept inside. Thankfully, this also prevented the predators from knowing that the solution to their overwhelming hunger pains was innocently playing in the backyard next door.

In spite of the hardships they endured, these cats were actually lucky because they ended up in specialized facilities that were able to provide for their unique needs for the rest of their lives. They were taken in by a sanctuary and given large enclosures with waterfalls, trees, ponds, and everything else they needed to be able to express their natural behaviors in a safe and secure manner. Sadly, this is not the case for those animals being kept in small, for-profit zoos and other places that use the public's curiosity about these animals to make money. Possibly even worse are those individuals who keep them in their personal homes in a misguided attempt to use the mystique of these animals to boost their own fragile egos.

This is not a property rights issue. No one has the right to jeopardize the safety of their neighbors and first responders by keeping predators as pets and doing so is a selfish disregard for those unfortunate enough to live and work nearby. This is not a state's rights issue. Law enforcement representatives from all over the country are asking for this bill because the states can't do it alone and need a common tool to best address this wide-reaching problem. This is a non-partisan public safety issue. This bill protects citizens from irresponsible and unlicensed owners and it protects those of us who are expected to respond when an animal escapes or a person is attacked. I encourage your support of HR 263 and I hope that it can be passed before another tragedy occurs.

Thank you,

Jamey Cantrell
President