



March 15, 2023

House Committee on Judiciary
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support HB 3214, traveling animal acts

Dear Chair Kropf, Vice Chairs Andersen and Wallan and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Oregon-based supporters of the Humane Society of the United States, please accept this testimony in support of HB 3214, which would prohibit circuses and other acts from using dangerous wildlife including, bears, elephants, nonhuman primates, and wild cats (among others) in traveling performances. These inhumane, outdated acts force captive wild animals into unnatural displays and performances that threaten both public safety and animal welfare standards.

Wild animals used in traveling shows endure months of prolonged confinement and grueling travel from city to city while being subject to training methods involving pain and fear of punishment. They're caged and chained in trucks and trailers, forced to endure months of grueling travel, bullied to perform silly tricks, and are denied everything that is natural and important to them. There is ample documentation and irrefutable evidence that the suffering these animals endure is real and systemic throughout the industry, and that existing laws do not sufficiently protect them.

Although animal exhibitors are required to be licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which enforces the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA), a USDA license is not evidence of exceptional—or even adequate—animal care. The AWA establishes only very minimal guidelines and as a result, exhibitors can—and all too often do—subject animals to grossly inhumane conditions, and yet are still considered in compliance with the law. The AWA is also poorly enforced. The Office of Inspector General has criticized the USDA for its weak AWA enforcement which continues to be exceedingly low.

Traveling animal acts bring people into dangerous proximity to powerful and unpredictable wild animals. Animal trainers have been attacked, and sometimes killed, in front of audiences. This includes a horrific incident in Portland a number of years ago in which two leashed and collared circus chimps dragged a trainer into the stands and then pulled a child from her seat onto the arena floor and mauled her. In another incident at the Oregon facility of an exhibitor who has traveled with and exhibited big cats around the U.S., a teenager was bitten by a leopard during a public photo shoot. Following the incident, the leopard was placed loose and unattended in the gift shop where it attacked and injured a toddler and an adult.

Over 175 localities across the U.S., including Benton, Clatsop, Multnomah, and Washington Counties in Oregon, and eight states (California, Hawaii, Kentucky, Colorado, Illinois, New York, Rhode Island, and New Jersey) have taken action to limit traveling wild animal acts.

The public's distaste for these acts has been growing for decades and many forms of family entertainment, including former animal-based circuses, deliver quality amusement without the suffering inherent in wild animal acts. In just one example, Ringling Bros. circus, which ended a 146-year history of coercive and inherently inhumane wild animal acts in 2017, announced that it will be re-launching the circus without animal acts in 2023.

We ask for your support of this important legislation.

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