

WHAT THE BILL DOES

Prohibits private ownership of tigers, lions, leopards, cheetahs, jaguars, cougars (“big cats”) or any hybrid of these species and restricts direct contact between the public and big cats. Current owners would be grandfathered in and required to register their animals with the government. Universities, sanctuaries, and entities with a Class C USDA license (public exhibition license) are exempt.

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

A majority of big cats in captivity are tigers. While there is no official count, conservative assessments gauge that there are **5,000-7,000 privately held tigers in the U.S.** (*other sources claim as many as 10,000-20,000*). This far exceeds the number of **wild tigers**, of which there are **approximately 3,200 worldwide**.

REASONS FOR SUPPORT

The Current Regulatory Framework Is Inadequate. There is **no federal law** that regulates the ownership of exotic animals. Current regulation is a **patchwork of ineffective state laws**.

- The weakness, variance, and under-enforcement of state big cat laws make them inadequate to protect public safety or animal welfare. Since breeding and sales are interstate activities, inconsistent restrictions cannot adequately address public safety or animal welfare concerns and necessitate a uniform federal framework.
 - *In many states it is easier to purchase a tiger cub than to go to a local humane society and adopt a puppy.*
- Even the state laws that exist are generally ineffective, and state governments regularly fail to meet tracking requirements and under-enforce big cat regulations.

Privately Owned Big Cats Face Neglect And Abuse. Privately owned big cats are subjected to **neglect and abuse**; they face **high mortality rates** (*it is estimated that up to 90% die within the first 2 years*), significant long term health problems, and high prospects for abandonment and euthanasia.

- Owners are largely **incognizant of the resources** needed to care for a big cat. Feeding and providing basic medical care for one adult tiger costs a **minimum of \$10,000 per year**, not including the expenses necessary to build a sufficiently secure enclosure for housing the tiger.
- Big cats and cubs, regardless of whether they are being kept for pets or serving as attractions in roadside zoos, are regularly **deprived of appropriate nutrition, shelter, medical care, socialization, and exercise**.
 - Often held in very small spaces such as kennels/cages that are inconsistent with their natural behaviors.
 - Subjected to inhumane practices (including body modifications) and physically abused in an attempt to control or condition them to tolerate direct physical contact with humans.
 - Cubs are routinely separated from mother cats in order so they can be used in public exhibits and maximize their docility to humans. This causes long-term physical and psychological harm including malnutrition, increased vulnerability to disease, and premature mortality. *Big cat mothers have been documented emitting mournful calls for weeks after being forcibly separated from their offspring.*

Read the City Bar’s report in support of Big Cat Public Safety Act here: <https://bit.ly/3aPyYns>.

Privately Owned Big Cats Face Neglect And Abuse. (cont.)

- Many privately-owned tigers are **genetically inbred** and hence are far more likely to suffer from genetic defects. **Only 1 in 30 cubs is likely to be healthy**. The vast majority of cubs suffer from significant deformities, vision problems, long term health issues, and high mortality rates.
 - *The white tiger is so rarely seen in the wild that only 12 white tigers have been confirmed in the wild in the past 100 years. All white tigers in captivity in the U.S. today are descendants of a single, anomalous Bengal named Mohan, captured in 1951 and bred with his daughter.*
- Only a **small minority** of privately held tigers in zoos (*approximately 350*) live in facilities **accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums** (AZA).
- Although facilities open to the public are required to obtain licenses and undergo periodic inspections by the USDA, **standards are nominal and enforcement is poor**.
- Cub-petting attractions drive a **vicious cycle of breeding, trading, and dumping tigers**. By the time cubs are only 3 months old they have become too big and dangerous to pet. The resulting tiger surplus is too large to be absorbed by AZA accredited zoos or bona-fide sanctuaries. Tigers become breeders, are sold to another disreputable facility, or killed for their skins and bones; others are killed simply to reduce inventory.

Public Safety. The private ownership of big cats presents a serious risk to the safety of the public and law enforcement agents. Big cats are wild animals and retain their natural instincts to hunt and attack, regardless of how they are raised; they **cannot be domesticated**. Unlike companion animals, who have been domesticated over centuries, **big cats always maintain their natural instincts to hunt and attack**.

Private Ownership Does Not Contribute To Conservation Goals And In Fact Undermines Them.

- In the past century, the **wild population of tigers decreased by 97%**.
- Captive big cats have **never been successfully released back into the wild**. Most large captive-bred carnivores die if returned to their natural habitat, as they lack the natural behaviors critical for success in the wild.
- Unmonitored breeding and private possession of big cats stimulates their **illegal trafficking** amid high demand. The U.S.' lack of federal tracking of big cats and fragmented, lax, and inconsistent state regulatory system means that there is no way to ascertain how many privately owned big cats exist, let alone their location or their method of death.
- The trade in parts of captive tigers **threatens wild tigers**. The illegal trade in products derived from captive tigers stimulates demand, especially for tigers in the wild, which are cheaper for poachers to kill than to buy captive animals from breeders.
- There is a strong **link between wildlife trafficking and human trafficking, and drugs and weapons trade**. According to the U.S. State Department, the same criminals that traffic wildlife also traffic drugs, guns, and people. *In 2019 leaders from 80 countries signed a declaration identifying this link and recognizing wildlife trafficking as organized crime and an imperative matter that must be tackled collaboratively.*
- The federal regulation of captive big cats would **enhance U.S. credibility abroad**.

**WE URGE THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS TO ENACT THE BIG CAT PUBLIC SAFETY ACT
IN ORDER TO PROTECT BIG CATS FROM ABUSE, ENSURE PUBLIC SAFETY AND
CONTRIBUTE TO CONSERVATION EFFORTS**