



# Big Cat Public Safety Act (H.R.263 / S.TBD)

Your calls to Congress can end the abuse.  
Please take 5 minutes to speak up for captive big cats!

The Big Cat Public Safety Act would end ownership of lions, tigers, and other dangerous big cats as pets and would prohibit cub petting and photo ops that cause excessive breeding of animals that are discarded after a few months of exploitation. In doing so, it eliminates significant sources of mistreatment of these animals, reduces danger to the public and to first responders, and enhances efforts to prevent the extinction of these endangered and threatened big cats in the wild.

**The spark that lit the flame.** The debate over private ownership of big cats garnered national attention in October 2011 when the owner of a backyard menagerie in Zanesville, Ohio, opened the cages of his tigers, leopards, lions, wolves, bears, and monkeys before committing suicide. Local police, who were neither trained or properly equipped to deal with a situation of that magnitude, were forced to shoot and kill nearly 50 animals—38 of them big cats—before these dangerous animals could enter populated areas.



In 2003, Congress unanimously passed the Captive Wildlife Safety Act (CWSA) recognizing that big cats did not belong in private hands. However, the CWSA had two gaping loopholes. First, it did not address the inappropriate ownership of big cats as pets by people who are not regulated by USDA as exhibitors. Second, it continued to allow rampant untracked breeding of cubs to be used for petting and photo ops by the small number of unscrupulous breeders who engage in this abusive practice. The Big Cat Public Safety Act addresses this by amending the CWSA to prohibit both ownership of these dangerous animals as pets and the incessant breeding of cubs for petting and photos. Current unlicensed pet owners are grandfathered in and simply required to register their animals with the USFWS.

**Mistreatment of cubs.** The cubs used in this despicable trade are typically torn from their mother at birth or shortly thereafter so they don't bond to the mother, deprived of the mother's milk that has antibodies to prevent disease, deprived of sleep which further weakens their immune systems, and physically punished to discourage their natural behaviors. Then, in a few months when they are too big to pet, there is no tracking of where they end up or how many die or are slaughtered to sell their parts into the international trade. Some end up in back yards. Many become part of breeding pairs and are "speed bred" as fast as possible, which is not natural and is a miserable, unhealthy life for the mothers.



**Mistreatment of adults as pets.** Big cats are wild animals and typically suffer psychologically and physically when kept as pets. They are often purchased as babies and, when they become too big to handle, are often left to languish in grossly substandard conditions in tiny concrete floored chain-link cages and deprived of adequate or any veterinary care, a nutritious diet, and enrichment.



**Danger to public and first responders.** There have been more than 700 dangerous incidents in the U.S. involving big cats, including hundreds of human injuries, mauling, and deaths. In many cases, the animals were shot and killed, often by first responders who are not equipped to deal with these situations. Among the most dramatic examples was an October 2011 incident in Zanesville, Ohio, in which a private exotic animal owner released dozens of big cats near a community, requiring law enforcement to kill the cats—and risk their own lives—for the sake of public safety.

**Impact on zoos.** Hundreds of zoos in this country who are licensed as exhibitors by USDA operate successfully without allowing contact or close proximity to big cat cubs. There are only a handful of unscrupulous operators who make this their business model, and it is totally unnecessary. They, like the hundreds of others, could operate successfully without causing all this misery to these majestic animals.

**Negative impact on conservation in the wild.** Claims that cub petting somehow helps these species in the wild are false. The only relevant studies, done with primates, concluded that human proximity to animals lowers concerns about conservation, it does not raise them. Further, the State Department has confirmed that the rampant, untracked breeding in this country is problematic in their efforts to work with foreign governments to stop the tiger farming and trafficking that threatens the existence of tigers and other species in the wild. The pro tiger farming countries correctly point out that at least they know where their tigers are.



**State laws inadequate for this heavily interstate trade.** State laws regarding private ownership of big cats range from strong bans on ownership (exempting the zoos who meet the high standards of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums) to some states that have few or no laws regarding the keeping of big cats. A uniform federal law is necessary to address the senseless rampant breeding of cubs that end up crossing state lines both during the few months they are small enough for petting and afterward when they are disposed of and become inappropriate dangerous pets or breeders of yet more cubs all over the country.

## **HELP END BIG CAT ABUSE**

### **Make the Call of the Wild!**

**Step 1:** Go to **BigCatAct.com** on your computer or from your mobile phone **text CATS to 52886** and click on the link you receive back.

**Step 2:** Simply input the required information into the system and click the “Find Legislators” button. Review the brief talking points and click the “Call me” button. You’ll receive a call and hear a short-recorded message.

**Step 3:** The system will automatically patch you through to your U.S. Representative and Senators’ offices. If you prefer, you can call at night or on the weekend and just leave a voice message. Phone calls are **immensely** effective because so few people call Congress! Simply say the following or something similar: *“Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and my zip code is \_\_\_\_\_. Please ask your boss to end ownership of big cats as pets and abusive cub petting by supporting the Big Cat Public Safety Act (H.R.263 / S.TBD). Thank you!”*

**Step 4:** Don’t hang up! The system automatically calls the next office. You’ll be done in less than 5 minutes!

**Every call helps!** If enough constituents call, legislators will take notice. Legislators have many bills coming at them. The best way this bill will get their attention is for them to know that many of their constituents care. The only way they know you care is through your calls.

**These cats cannot speak for themselves. Please be their voice.**