

SENATE BILL REPORT

E2SHB 1151

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Health & Long-Term Care, February 26, 2004

Title: An act relating to the keeping of dangerous wild animals.

Brief Description: Regulating the keeping of dangerous wild animals.

Sponsors: House Committee on Judiciary (originally sponsored by Representatives Lovick, Lantz, Jarrett, Miloscia, Delvin, Moeller, Wallace, G. Simpson and Upthegrove).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 2/26/04 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Deccio, Chair; Winsley, Vice Chair; Brandland, Franklin, Keiser and Thibaudeau.

Staff: Rhoda Donkin (786-7198)

Background: Current law bans private ownership of certain wild species of animal, such as coyotes, skunks, raccoons, bats and foxes because they are known carriers of rabies. Other wild animals may not be brought into this state because the introduction of their genes and the disease they could bring make them a threat to the state's indigenous wildlife. The state Fish and Wildlife Department also regulates the ownership of certain wild animals naturally found in the state.

The federal government, through the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA), regulates the management of exotic species of animals that are involved in some sort of commercial enterprise, including exhibiting these animals. Rules for the care and treatment of monkeys, large cats, snakes, bears and crocodiles, for example, are specific and enforced by the USDA.

The number of privately-owned exotic pets in this state is unknown. As pets alone, their handling, care, and treatment is largely determined by the owners themselves, and the various associations which coordinate and share exotic pet owning activities. There has been concern that some of these animals pose a public health threat because wild animals are not capable of domestication and also because they may carry disease which can be passed to humans. For example, some nonhuman primates are aggressive after they reach puberty, and their bites are considered dangerous. Large felines are predatory by nature and if not handled with utmost understanding of this, can be extremely dangerous. Reptiles are considered carriers of salmonella, and the introduction of them into the home may increase the possible exposure to that illness. Certain monkeys carry the B-virus, which if contracted by humans causes fatal encephalitis.

Animal control is regulated on the city and county level in Washington. Some cities and counties currently ban the ownership of certain classes of animals. For example, King County bans ownership of venomous snakes, nonhuman primates, bears, non-domesticated felines, and canines (wolves and coyotes) and crocodiles.

Summary of Bill: The possession of potentially dangerous wild animals is prohibited. "Potentially dangerous wild animal" is defined and includes large cats, wolves, bears, primates, venomous snakes, and crocodiles.

A person who owns a potentially dangerous wild animal prior to the effective date of the act may keep it until July 1, 2009. The owner may request permission to keep the animal after that date from the local animal control authority. The request may not be unreasonably denied.

A civil penalty may be levied on someone who acquires a potentially dangerous wild animal after the effective date of the act, or owns a potentially dangerous wild animal after July 1, 2009. A violation is subject to fines from \$200 to \$2,000 for each animal and each day of the violation.

An animal control authority may confiscate a potentially dangerous wild animal that is being kept in violation of this act.

Certain entities are exempt from the provisions of this act including zoos, aquariums, animal protection organizations, veterinary hospitals, wildlife sanctuaries, research facilities and others.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This bill has been significantly revised since last session. It will eventually eliminate private ownership of wild animals in this state, except in recognized zoological institutions. These privately owned wild animals pose a safety threat to the community, and can not be cared for or kept in a manner that replicates their natural needs. This statewide ban is long overdue.

Testimony Against: There is little evidence that the ownership of wild animals poses a threat to anyone except irresponsible owners. Wild animal owners care deeply about their pets, and in many cases we take wild animals that no one else, including zoos, will take. If this bill goes into effect, many innocent wild animals in this state will have to die, because there will be no place to put them. Animals shouldn't have to die just because they exist.

Testified: PRO: Rep. John Lovick; Gordon Walgren, Federation of Animal Control Agencies; Bruce Bjork, Chief, DFW; Dr. Darin Collins, Woodland Park Zoo; John McCroskey, Lewis County Sheriff; CON: John Tussmeyer, Alliance for the Conservation of Exotic Felines; Jeanne Hall, Phoenix Exotic Wildlife Assn.; Selena Michaelis; Alliance for the Conservation of Exotic Felines; Phil Rodenberg, Pacific NW Herpetological Society; Anthony Talltree; Gloria Gilbert, Phoenix Exotics; Mike Wyche, Cat Tales Zoological.

Signed In/Did Not Testify: PRO: Jennifer Hillman, PAWS; Gary Geddes, Pt. Defiance/NW Trek; Debbie Wyche, Cat Tales Zoological.