



March 8, 2016

TO: House Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee
Representative Sharon Schwartz, Chairperson
FROM: Jim Fouts, Owner/Director, Tanganyika Wildlife Park
RE: Support for Senate Bill 97

Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am Jim Fouts, Owner/Director of Tanganyika Wildlife Park in Goddard, Kansas. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 97.

I have 44 years of experience working in the zoo industry starting as an animal keeper in 1972. In 1978, I began supplying birds and animals to zoos worldwide from our facilities in Africa and elsewhere, a practice that continues today. Tanganyika Wildlife Park is a private, family owned and operated zoo and is home to over 400 birds, animals, and reptiles. We specialize in rare and endangered species ranging from black-footed penguins to Indian rhinoceros, and from critically endangered Amur leopard to cheetahs. Tanganyika is the most interactive zoo in Kansas when considering our animal ambassador programs and interactive stations. Tanganyika is one of the largest attractions in Kansas having more than 105,000 visitors in 2015. We are accredited by the Zoological Association of America.

SB 97 simply allows accredited zoos in Kansas to have the option of using young cubs in our educational programs. This is consistent with other zoos across the nation, such as the San Diego Zoo, Columbus, Nashville, Dallas, and Miami, just to name a few. SB 97 passed the Senate last session.

Our ambassador and educational programs often include our young animals giving participants a more personal experience as they learn about the unique characteristics of these endangered species. There is no better way to educate folks than through an interactive immersive experience. Currently, we are unable to do this because there is no distinction in the current law between a 10 pound and a 400 pound cat. Our cats have been on Letterman, Good Morning America, Fox and Friends and many other programs outside Kansas, but under the current law we are not allowed take our young cats to local TV. SB 97 would allow us to do this once again. Is it safe? We practiced this for 20 years prior to the current laws passage without incident, in fact there have no serious incidents whatsoever involving baby cats in Zoos. If approved, this bill would allow trainers to educate guests by using these young cubs in their first few weeks and months of life.

Despite what you may hear from opponents, this bill does not allow private pet ownership of these cats, regardless of size. We supported the legislation that banned private ownership of these big cats that was passed in 2005. This bill refers to immature and baby animals, animals that pose NO threat to the public, and due to the limited interaction we allow, the public poses no threat to the animals. There are no cases in any zoos in which these young cubs have harmed visitors.

Our zoo has a petition signed by 1,492 Kansas and out of state visitors urging you to grant this request.

The passage of SB 97 will help Tanganyika to continue to build on our endangered species programs by encouraging more people to participate in wildlife conservation. It will also give us a tool to continue our growth as a premier regional attraction for Kansas.

On behalf of Tanganyika and our future visitors, we appreciate your support of these changes and I will now yield for questions.

Jim Fouts
Director
Tanganyika Wildlife Park
Goddard, Kansas