



March 8, 2016
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

Chair Schwartz and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding dangerous regulated animals in Kansas. My name is Midge Grinstead and I am the state director for The Humane Society of the United States. On behalf of HSUS and our supporters in Kansas, I urge the committee to oppose Senate Bill 97.

In 2005, after a high school student was killed while having her senior pictures taken with a tiger, Kansas legislators moved quickly to pass a bill to prevent a similar incident from ever happening again. The resulting legislation essentially banned the private ownership of big cats, bears, and non-native venomous snakes, and prohibited public handling of these animals. That was an important and necessary first step to address the serious issue of private ownership of dangerous wild animals in our state. SB97 seeks to weaken our commonsense law, by allowing the public to hold, handle, and play with big cats such as tigers, lions, cougars, and leopards who weigh as much as 40 pounds. SB97 would put an unsuspecting public at risk for unnecessary harm, negatively impact animal welfare, and reverse the very progressive stance that Kansas has demonstrated on this issue.

Public handling of wild animals is not safe at any weight. Tigers and other big cats retain their basic instincts, even if they are captive born and hand raised. Even young big cats, bears, and primates have sharp teeth and claws that can inflict serious injury and numerous USDA licensed exhibitors have exposed the public to big cat cubs infected with ringworm as well as coccidia and giardia. These animals can and have caused numerous deaths and many serious injuries. Individuals and unaccredited entities simply do not have the knowledge, experience or resources to safely house and meet the specialized needs of wild animals. As a result, communities and the public are put at unnecessary risk.

Baby animals who are used for public photo and play sessions are typically taken from their mothers at birth and are subjected to excessive handling, physical discipline, interrupted rest, and improper nutrition. At just a few months of age they are typically discarded, with some ending up warehoused at poorly run roadside zoos and pseudo-sanctuaries or in the hands of unqualified people with private menageries.

Finally, allowing the public to handle dangerous wild animals negatively impacts true conservation efforts. People who handle pet or play with exotic animals are inspired to acquire wild animals as pets. The public is also left with the dangerous and inaccurate perception that deadly predators who are captive-bred and hand-reared will grow into docile, friendly animals. And studies confirm that seeing humans interact with endangered animals leads people to falsely believe that these animals are not threatened or endangered in the wild.

I respectfully urge this committee to put the safety of the public first by opposing SB 97.

Thank you,

Midge Grinstead, State Director – The Humane Society of the United States