

Good Afternoon, My name is Clay Thomas;

I testified back in 2006 when the dangerous animal law was originally passed. It was certainly something I had hoped to never have to do again.

In 1999, my wife and her Boy Scout troop had purchased an overnight "Camp Package" from a small private zoo here in Kansas. Part of the package included a photo shoot with various animals. During the shoot, a Siberian tiger grabbed my wife by the right hand and pulled it into the cage, severing her arm at the elbow. This required 13 surgeries to attempt to repair damages.

The photo taken seconds before the incident is an incredibly good one! The children all lined up in front of and against the cage, my wife at the end holding her right hand up, which happens to be right in front of the tigers face. The few seconds that followed certainly changed all of our lives. Those few seconds were the beginning of an almost Seven year journey that eventually killed my wife. I cannot begin to tell you how those few seconds affected my then 12 year old son who was standing next to his mother during the attack and the way those few seconds have affected him to this day.

What happened to us was an accident. The owner of the tiger loved his animals very much and was trying to do what he thought was best for them. He had hand raised this animal from a cub. Unfortunately, you cannot domesticate an animal in one generation. Animals come with instincts and they are going to do what comes naturally to them. I know and understand that the proposed changes to the current law has nothing to do with the big cats like the huge Siberian Tiger that caused us such grief. They will continue to be prohibited from public contact. The proposed law does, however, remove all regulation regarding Clouded Leopards which can weigh up to 50 pounds and Cheetahs that can weigh up to 160 pounds. With this new law, your neighbors will be able to keep these now unregulated animals in their back yards.

I fail, however, to understand how a forty-pound weight limit makes a wild and dangerous animal safe. I've now spent considerable time "Googling" how much various animals weigh and I just don't understand this rationale. I challenge you to find documentation that says danger starts at 40 pounds.

Looking back on our own situation, I wonder why we would ever put out children within inches of a huge tiger or any wild animal. I guess we put our trust and faith in the guide who's showing us the animal and who we regard by association, as an expert. I'm positive the trainers and guides dearly love the animal they are showing but they are unable to fully and completely guarantee the animals' inherent instincts can be restrained.

Even now, I carry considerable guilt over our incident. After the accident we did nothing but take care of ourselves. We only looked within our own situation. I failed to think of others. In 2006, when I testified before both the Senate and House committees, I sat next to parents that lost their beautiful daughter during a photo session with a tiger. If I had taken the initiative immediately after our accident to begin the process of limiting public access to wild and dangerous animals maybe those grieving parents would not of had to of been there. Just maybe that accident would of never happened.

The proposed Sec. 2(e)(5) reads:

Before a member of the public handles or otherwise comes into physical contact with a dangerous regulated animal weighing between 10 and 40 pounds, not including bears or any hybrid thereof and nonnative venomous snakes, such member of the public shall read and sign a statement that shall contain substantially the following:

"The handling or petting of a dangerous regulated animal is inherently dangerous and may result in scratches, bites or other injuries."

Is this what you want to subject your children or grandchildren too? I had asked my local Senator, who I consider to be a fine person, to oppose this bill. Unfortunately, He voted for it. I wrote to him to express my disappointment in his vote. I admit, I used rather strong words. In his reply, He says:

I'm sorry for your feelings. The owners and sponsor of this great zoo are friends and I believe adequate safeguards are in place. To have the us humane society also oppose this bill clinched the deal for me
Rick Wilborn

I believe Senator Wilborn is a good person and I am glad to have him representing our district. We just disagree on this subject. I would ask you, however, to not let your personal friendships or vendettas against people and organizations cloud your judgment regarding the safety of the people in this State.

In this room is a wealth of knowledge regarding animals but there is a difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad and it is wisdom that we not expose innocent children and the untrained public to dangerous animals, regardless of their weight!

I therefore beg of you to not pass SB97. If passed, at some point in the future something will happen again. Maybe the odds of an accident are reduced by only allowing access to smaller animals. I prefer to eliminate the odds all together. If SB97 is passed, at some point, an accident will happen. Someone will be hurt or someone will be killed and it will be you who will have to bear the burden of guilt on reflection of this occasion. Please take my experience into consideration and trust me when I tell you that burden is enormous.

Thank You,

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