Operation WildLife Inc
23375 Guthrie Rd
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March 8, 2016

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding Senate Bill 97. I oppose this bill and urge the committee to do so as well.

For the past 28 years I have been the director of Operation Wildlife. Operation WildLife, Inc. (OWL) provides rehabilitation services for injured and orphaned wild animals, and wildlife education for the citizens of northeast Kansas and northwest Missouri.

OWL is the largest publicly funded wildlife clinic in Kansas, (KDWPT statistics). We receive over 3000 wild animals each year mainly from Northeast Kansas. OWL receives NO state or federal funding, relying entirely on donations to exist. We have been called on to handle "exotic animals that have been acquired illegally or dumped". Unfortunately, the outcome for the majority of these calls is euthanasia for the animals in question.

SB 97 will create a cycle of breeding, exploiting, and then dumping baby animals after a few months and will fuel the exotic pet trade. This bill puts animals at risk, endangers the public, and creates a burden for both law enforcement and sanctuaries. What happens to the surplus of animals created by reckless breeding for public contact exhibition? Do these former photo prop animals become warehoused in roadside zoos and backyards around the country?

While exhibition of animals is regulated by the USDA, public handling of these animals is largely unmonitored. Baby exotic cats have sharp teeth and claws and any wild animal can transmit diseases to people such as rabies, E-coli, toxoplasmosis, salmonellosis, cat scratch fever, leptospirosis, giardia, pasteurellosis, cryptosporidiosis, sarcoptic mange to name a few. Many of these diseases are transferred via a bite or scratch but some can be transmitted just by contact. Humans most susceptible are children, pregnant women and the elderly.

People who are allowed to handle exotic animals are inspired to acquire wild animals as pets which are illegal in our state. The public is also left with the dangerous and inaccurate perception that deadly predators that are captive-bred and hand-reared will grow into docile, friendly animals. Take a moment to look at this website: These big cat attacks are only the ones that have made the news. http://bigcatrescue.org/big-cat-attacks/ and yes there have been attacks in Kansas too.

In closing I would like to offer this analogy as an example. The common house cat domesticated for over 4000 years still retains predatory instincts; catching & killing its own food; defending its territory and often scratching & biting you at will. And let's not forget the old adage "No one owns a cat; they own you".

Please continue to protect the public from dangerous regulated animals and oppose Senate Bill 97.

Thank you,

Diane Johnson, RVT

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Executive Director

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