



PROHIBITING CIRCUSES and Traveling Shows that Use Wild Animals

Increased awareness of the abuse and neglect that animals used in traveling shows suffer, coupled with the public safety risks, has led to more than 150 municipalities and six states across the United States prohibiting or restricting the use of wild animals in traveling exhibitions.

PROTECTING ANIMALS FROM ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Wild animals in circuses and traveling shows spend most of their days in cramped, barren cages, deprived of the ability to engage in their natural behaviors. They are typically denied anything that might satisfy their complex physical, behavioral, and emotional needs. Trainers force wild animals to perform frightening and sometimes painful tricks often by using physical violence or by withholding food and water.

PUBLIC SAFETY RISKS

Forcing wild animals into close proximity to humans creates a serious public safety risk. There have been numerous incidents of animals escaping, injuring, or even killing circus staff or members of the public. Many traveling shows are ill-equipped to protect people from dangerous wild animals. Companies usually rely on collapsible, temporary, and mobile facilities that are unable to consistently contain animals.

LACK OF REGULATION AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

Circuses and traveling shows are regulated by the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). But the AWA only establishes minimal standards of care for licensees in terms of housing, food, and sanitation and permits the use of cruel bullhooks, electrical shocks, and whips. Further, enforcement is extremely lax with roughly 120 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspectors overseeing the thousands of facilities regulated by the AWA, including puppy mills, zoos, and research laboratories.

A GROWING TREND ACROSS THE COUNTRY

In addition to more than 150 cities and counties, six states ban or restrict the use of wild animals in traveling exhibitions. In 2018, Hawaii and New Jersey banned the use of most wild animals in both circuses and traveling acts. In 2019, California banned the use of all animals, with the exception of dogs, cats, and domesticated horses, in circuses only.

Additionally, in 2017, New York and Illinois prohibited the use of elephants in traveling acts while Rhode Island banned the use of bullhooks — fire poker-like devices used to jab elephants in the most sensitive parts of their bodies — in 2016.



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