Dangerous Wild Animals in Texas (SB 641/HB 1268)

Keeping wild animals as pets threatens public health and safety as well as animal welfare. Wild animals can cause death, inflict serious injury, and spread deadly diseases, and the average pet owner cannot provide the care they need in captivity. Yet, unlicensed individuals can legally possess these animals in much of our state.

In light of substantial evidence of the clear and considerable risks associated with the private possession of dangerous wild animals, Texas lawmakers should follow the 37 other states that have strengthened their laws to ensure that only fiscally-sound facilities with knowledgeable and experienced staff can possess species that pose a danger to the public and require special, long-term, and costly care.

**Threat to animal welfare**
Most individuals cannot provide appropriate and humane care for captive wild animals. When the animals grow too large and difficult to handle, they are typically confined to small cages or dumped at unaccredited zoos. Experts, including the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, oppose the private possession of wild animals as pets.

**Threat to public safety**
Wild animals retain their basic instincts, even if they are born in captivity and raised by humans. Emergency personnel should not have to confront a rampaging chimpanzee, a stalking tiger, or a bear running amok. And communities and adjacent property owners should not have to wonder if a resident’s dangerous and predatory exotic pets are securely contained and safely handled.

**Threat to public health**
Wild animals can carry deadly diseases. For example, macaque monkeys, who are commonly kept as pets, naturally carry the Herpes B virus. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “[T]he consequences of symptomatic [Herpes B] infection may be severe,” with a nearly 80% mortality rate in untreated humans.

**Many states ban dangerous wild animals as pets**
Numerous states, including South Carolina, Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Washington, and West Virginia have enacted legislation prohibiting certain wild animals as pets. With exotic and native wildlife readily available from animal dealers and over the Internet, states that do not act will attract a growing problem.
Incidents involving dangerous wild animals in Texas include:

2018/Edinburg: A two-year-old child had to be flown to a San Antonio hospital after he was severely injured by a snow macaque being kept as someone’s pet, potentially exposing the child to Herpes B. The monkey's owner continues to keep primates as pets, posing a continued risk to his South Texas community.

2016/Conroe: The Conroe Police Department received a report of a tiger roaming a residential neighborhood after the animal escaped from someone’s backyard. Animal control officers had to capture the tiger and house her in the city animal shelter until a zoo accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums could assist.

2015/San Antonio: A bank teller was hospitalized after being bit on the face by an unrestrained juvenile macaque. A man brought the macaque into the bank and fled with the monkey following the attack. Authorities located the owner and seized the monkey. The owner claimed the monkey was a service animal.

2014/Gatesville: Two bonnet macaques being kept as pets escaped from their owner's home. One was shot and killed and the other, a pregnant female, remained on the loose at least five days after escaping.

2014/Coryell County: A bonnet macaque being kept as a pet escaped and reportedly attacked a man and his dogs. A sheriff's deputy captured the macaque in a net, but the animal escaped again when it was returned to the owners and was not recaptured until two days later.

2011/Odessa: A 4-year-old boy was mauled by a 150-pound cougar who was kept as a pet by a relative. The boy was taken to hospital with significant damage to the left side of his body. The cougar was seized by animal control officials and euthanized.

2009/Ingram: A 330-pound pet tiger escaped from her enclosure and was discovered in the residential backyard of a 79-year-old woman. The tiger was shot with a tranquilizer dart and recaptured.

2009/Spring: A hyena attacked a man who was applying for a job at TGR Exotics. The man claimed that the hyena nearly ripped his arm off. The hyena had previously bitten a veterinarian and escaped twice, killing a llama and two goats.

2008/Crosby: The Houston SPCA seized a sick and emaciated 23-year-old male pet chimpanzee who was living in a garage in a 15-square-foot cage littered with cigarette butts, soda cans, and other trash. He had been living in those conditions for 15 years and was suffering from malnutrition and ailments related to a lack of exposure to sunlight.

2007/Dallas: A 1-year-old, 180-pound tiger was found shot to death in a wooded area off the interstate. The female tiger was declawed and wearing a make-shift leash.

2006/Kaufman County, Texas: A 300-pound tiger climbed out of an uncovered enclosure and mauled a part-time employee of Zoo Dynamics, a traveling zoo owned by Marcus Cook. The man spent the weekend in intensive care and received some 2,000 stitches. An employee took the victim to the hospital without notifying local authorities that a tiger was still loose on the premises.

2006/Bell County: A person bitten by a pet rhesus macaque was taken to the hospital for treatment. The monkey was killed to be tested for rabies.

2003/Frisco: A 4-month-old, 50-pound declawed tiger cub was abandoned and captured by police after a motorist spotted the animal roaming on the side of the road.

2002/Magnolia: A pet Java macaque attacked and bit a 9-year-old boy and a woman and severely scratched a firefighter, sending all three to the hospital for treatment.

2001/Lee County: A 3-year-old boy was killed by one of three of a relative's pet tigers. The 250-pound tiger snatched the boy from the arms of an adult, clamped down on his leg, and dragged him around the enclosure, causing head injuries.

2000/Harris County: Animal control officers spent three hours searching for a pet tiger who had escaped from a backyard cage while the owners were out of town. The tiger was tranquilized and recaptured.

2000/Channelview: A 4-year-old boy had his arm torn off, mid-bicep, by his uncle's 400-pound pet tiger. Surgeons spent nine hours reattaching the arm and within just five days the boy’s medical bills totaled $80,000.

1999/Yorktown: A 10-year-old girl was killed when one of her stepfather’s two pet tigers grabbed her by the neck and dragged her into a water trough.