Big Cat Public Safety Act (HR 263 / S 1210)

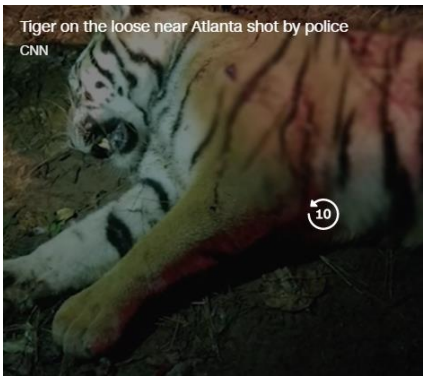
The bill has two simple provisions: (1) it phases out private ownership of lions, tigers, and other dangerous big cats as pets by individuals not licensed by USDA, grandfathering in current owners, and (2) stops the cub petting and photo ops that cause excessive breeding of animals that are discarded after a few months of exploitation. In doing so it eliminates major sources of mistreatment of these animals, enhances efforts to prevent extinction of these endangered and threatened big cats in the wild, and reduces danger to the public and to first responders.

Mistreatment of cubs. The cubs used in this despicable trade are typically torn from their mother at birth or shortly thereafter, so they don't bond to the mother, deprived of the mother's milk that has antibodies to prevent disease, deprived of sleep which further weakens their immune systems, and physically punished to discourage their natural behaviors. Then, in a few months when they are too big to pet, there is no tracking of where they end up or how many die or are slaughtered to sell their parts into the international trade. Some end up in back yards.

Negative impact on conservation in the wild. Claims that cub petting somehow helps these species in the wild are false. The only relevant studies, done with primates, conclude that human proximity to animals lowers concerns about conservation, it does not raise them. Further, the State Department has confirmed that the rampant, untracked breeding in this country is problematic in their efforts to work with foreign governments to stop the tiger farming and trafficking that threatens the existence of tigers and other species in the wild. The pro tiger farming countries correctly point out that at least they know where their tigers are, in contrast to the large untracked population in backyards in the United States.

Danger to the public and first responders. There have been more than 700 dangerous incidents in the U.S. involving big cats, including hundreds of human injuries, mauling, and deaths. In many cases, the animals were shot and killed, often by first responders who are not trained to deal with these situations. Among the most dramatic examples was an October 2011 incident in Zanesville, Ohio, in which a private exotic animal owner released dozens of big cats near a community, requiring law enforcement to kill the cats—and risk their own lives—for the sake of public safety. In a letter to Congress urging support of the bill, Sheriff Matt Lutz from Zanesville described the incident this way: "In late 2011, when private big cat owner Terry Thompson let loose the 38 big cats and other exotics he kept on a farm in Muskingum County, it was up to me to determine what to do. In order to protect my community, I had to make the difficult decision to shoot the animals so they couldn't harm people. This decision, although the right one, brought major adversity to my office and my community. It also placed a heavy emotional burden on our Deputies, some of whom still carry that today."

Other examples include NYPD having to deal with a tiger in a Harlem apartment; a tiger who leaped out of a burning house over firefighters and into a law enforcement cruiser and tore up the inside; a pet lion left in a church during a hurricane preventing people from seeking safety from the storm there; and a six-year-old tiger who was shot by police in a residential neighborhood outside Atlanta.



These dangerous carnivores, cast off from the abusive cub petting trade, living miserable lives in back yards all over the country, present an absolutely unnecessary and unacceptable risk to first responders.

To join as a cosponsor please contact:

HOUSE: Max.Frankel@mail.house.gov (Rep. Quigley) or Evan.Schuler@mail.house.gov (Rep. Fitzpatrick)

SENATE: Alison_Council@blumenthal.senate.gov or Molly_Ryan@collins.senate.gov

EXAMPLES OF FIRST RESPONDERS WHO HAVE SUPPORTED THE BIG CAT PUBLIC SAFETY ACT

National Sheriffs' Association
Fraternal Order of Police
National Animal Control Association
Buckeye State Sheriffs' Association (Ohio)
Maine Sheriffs' Association
Sheriffs' Association of Texas
Texas Animal Control Association
Texas Municipal Police Association
West Virginia Sheriffs' Association
Louisiana Sheriffs' Association
Kansas Sheriffs Association
Florida Animal Control Association
Virginia Animal Control Association
Peace Officers Research Association of California
Vermont Sheriffs' Association
Arkansas Sheriffs' Association
City of San Antonio Texas Animal Care Services Department
Ed Kelso, FBI Agent (Retired)
Sheriff Jack Laurie, Atchison County, KS
Chief Chris Chafin, Fair Bluff, NC
Tim Harrison, Retired Police Officer/Firefighter/EMT-Paramedic, Oakwood, OH
(Currently an Adjunct Instructor for TEEX/National Emergency Response and Recovery Training Center at Disaster City-Texas A&M College, and Director of Outreach for Animals assisting First Responders with dangerous wild/exotic animal dispatches/incidents for over 47 years.
Sheriff Matt Lutz, Muskingum County, OH
(Who had to deal with the release of 56 big cats and other dangerous animals in Zanesville)
Sheriff Jim Mullett, Garvin County, OK
(Former home of Joe Exotic and Jeff Lowe from "Tiger King." Sheriff Mullett had to deal with an escaped lioness during the transition of Lowe's animals out of the County.)
Sheriff (Retired) Larry Rhodes, Garvin County, OK
(Who had to deal with Joe Exotic for eight years)
Lt. Joel Caldwell, Galveston, TX Police Dept
(Who has had to deal with escapes, including one where a lion had to be shot by an officer.)