

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 1151

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Health & Long-Term Care, April 3, 2003

Title: An act relating to the keeping of dangerous wild animals.

Brief Description: Regulating the keeping of dangerous wild animals.

Sponsors: House Committee on Judiciary (originally sponsored by Representatives Lovick, Lantz, Jarrett, Miloscia, Delvin, Moeller, Wallace, Simpson and Upthegrove).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 4/1/03, 4/3/03 [DPA].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Deccio, Chair; Winsley, Vice Chair; Brandland, Franklin, Keiser, Parlette and Thibaudeau.

Staff: Rhoda Donkin (786-7198)

Background: Current state law bans private ownership of certain wild species of animal, such as coyotes, skunks, raccoons, bats, and foxes because they are known carriers of rabies. Other wild animals may not be brought into this state because the introduction of their genes and the disease they could bring make them a threat to the state's indigenous wildlife. The state Fish and Wildlife Department also regulates the ownership of certain wild animals naturally found in the state.

The federal government, through the United States Department of Agriculture, regulates the management of exotic species of animals that are involved in some sort of commercial enterprise, including exhibiting these animals. Rules for the care and treatment of monkeys, large cats, snakes, bears, and crocodiles, for example, are specific and enforced by the USDA.

The number of privately-owned exotic pets in this state is unknown. As pets alone, their handling, care, and treatment is largely determined by the owners themselves, and the various associations which coordinate and share exotic pet owning activities. There has been concern that some of these animals pose a public health threat because some are not capable of domestication and they may carry disease which can be passed to humans. For example, some nonhuman primates are aggressive after they reach puberty, and their bites are considered dangerous. Large felines are predatory by nature, and if not handled with utmost understanding of this, can be extremely dangerous. All cold blooded animals are considered carriers of salmonella and the introduction of them into the home may increase the possible exposure to that illness. Certain monkeys carry the B-virus, which if contracted by humans causes fatal encephalitis.

Animal control is regulated on the city and county level in Washington. Some cities and counties currently ban the ownership of certain classes of animals. For example, King County bans ownership of venomous snakes, nonhuman primates, bears, nondomesticated felines and canines (wolves and coyotes), and crocodiles.

According to the Association of Washington Cities, there are 56 cities that employ an animal control officer or an equivalent position. In areas where no animal control authority exists, the local sheriff's office enforces local animal control ordinances.

Summary of Amended Bill: A study must be conducted by two members of the Senate and two members of the House of Representatives that will identify the risks and preventive measures needed in owning wild exotic animals.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill: The amended bill contains only a study of exotic wild animals as pets. The substitute bill established numerous restrictions on owning exotic wild animals.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (original bill) These animals are wild and should never be pets. They pose a safety and health threat to people and the care they require is beyond the capacity of most people. There are no regulations protecting the public, and many other states currently regulate them.

Testimony Against: (original bill) The state has no right to ban owning pets. There have been far more incidents of dog bites than there are of any exotic animal hurting anyone. This law penalizes responsible owners. Banning these animals will only force owners underground.

Testified: (original bill) David Coleburn, Predators of the Heart (con); David K. Hall, Pacific NW Herpetological Society (con); Justin D. Krueger, Puget Sound Reptiles (con); John G. Lussmyer, Alliance for the Conservation of Exotic Felines (con); Jeanne Hall, Phoenix Exotic Wildlife Assn. (con); Selena Michaelis, Alliance for the Conservation of Exotic Felines, Phoenix Exotic Wildlife Assn. (con); Sarah Hodges, Pacific Northwest Herpetological Society (con); Tammy Fellin, Assn. of WA Cities (con); Doug Levy, City of Everett (con); Sophia Byrd, WA Assoc. of Counties (con); Gloria Gilbert, Business Rainbow Pets (con); Frank Bodunulk (con); Sharon Ensley, PNWE, FCF, AZA (con); Jennifer Hillman, PAWS (pro); Dick Riddle (pro); John Huckabee (pro); Dr. Stewart Metz (pro); Gary Geddes, Executive Director, Pt. Defiance Zoo and Northwest Trek (pro); Gordon Walgren, Federation of Animal Care and Control Agencies (pro); Jim Jennings, Washington Animal Control Association (pro); Bruce Morgan, Washington Alternative Livestock Assn. (con).