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March 16, 2023

Oregon State Legislature
House Committee on Judiciary
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: HB 3214 (Hudson) Prohibition on use of animals in traveling acts — SUPPORT

Dear Chair Kropf, Vice Chairs Andersen and Wallan, and Members of the Committee:

The Animal Legal Defense Fund, a national animal protection nonprofit with thousands of supporters in Oregon writes to express support for HB 3214. This bill would prohibit the use of animals—including elephants, big cats, nonhuman primates, and bears—in traveling shows such as circuses in Oregon. Animals that are used in these types of shows are subjected to neglect, abusive training, prolonged confinement, and create a potential public safety risk. Many wild animal exhibitors have histories of federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA) violations and have been responsible for causing dangerous public safety incidents.

Wild animals used in circuses spend their lives in cramped cages, forced to perform unnatural and sometimes painful tricks, day in and day out. These animals endure constant stress and are denied the opportunity to engage in natural behaviors. Wild animals have complex behavioral, physical, and emotional needs that cannot be satisfied by traveling shows designed for human entertainment.

For example, many handlers use the “free contact” methods of elephant management. This method involves the use of sharp bullhooks or other weapons that are intended to inflict pain and fear. These bullhooks are used to beat, jab, hook, poke, and prod elephants and this practice is considered typical in traveling shows and circuses. This practice can start as early as infancy for the elephants and is not only cruel for the elephants but also presents a danger to the handlers.

Recently it has become increasingly common that countries, states, and cities are prohibiting the use of wild animals generally or certain species of animals in travelling shows. These laws protect both animals and public safety. After the 2013 documentary *Blackfish* there was a significant shift in the public opinion about forcing wild animals to perform unnatural behaviors for amusement and profit. In response to this shift, many circuses and traveling shows, such as Barnum & Bailey Circus, have already stopped the use of live animals and turned to other forms of entertainment, without animals.

Despite this positive trend, more can be done. Current federal laws and enforcement of these laws is inadequate to effectively protect these animals. Laws protecting these animals are few and far between, with the main mechanism of protections being the Animal Welfare Act. Though circuses and traveling acts fall within the bounds of this legislation, the standards set by the AWA are only baseline and are widely

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considered to be subpar in protecting animals. For example, the act does not prohibit the use of bullhooks or other similar devices that are commonly used in a cruel manner on the animals in these circuses. The requirements for housing, food, and sanitation are low and the AWA does not have any requirements for the mental stimulation of animals, except for primates.

When the federal laws do not provide enough protection for animals used as entertainment in circuses and traveling shows, state laws are a very effective way to bridge the gaps. Currently, six states have statewide bans on the use of animals in circuses and traveling shows and in almost every state there is at least one municipality that has enacted a restriction or a ban on all or certain types of animals being used in these shows, including Benton, Clatsop, and Multnomah counties in Oregon.¹

It is clear that many Oregon residents have demonstrated an ongoing commitment to raising animal welfare standards and the Oregon House of Representatives has the chance to increase this commitment by advancing HB 3214.

The use of animals in circuses and traveling shows does not align with the progressive, humane values Oregonians have for animals. It is for these reasons that the Animal Legal Defense Fund supports HB 3214 and asks you to do the same. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,



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¹ Bans on Circuses, Four Paws in US, <https://www.fourpawsusa.org/campaigns-topics/topics/wild-animals/worldwide-circus-bans>