

Written Statement to Committee by Jeanne Hall

RE: HB1151 January 16, 2004

Exotic Owners come from all walks of life.

At the end of the day, we go home just like you and enjoy our pets. Yours may be a Doberman, mine is a snake or a hedgehog or a ferret or a cat.

Most owners are not aware that the government they depend upon to protect their interests is considering banning their pets. The first word many have heard is on the news yesterday and today.

Most exotic owners simply love and care for their animals without being involved in organizations. Just as most dog owners simply care for and love their dogs. Most dog owners are not even aware of the Breed Specific Bans that are popping up and could effect them. Most exotic owners are also unaware of such things.

The individuals here today to address the committee against this bill have taken off work, hired baby sitters, and spent their own money to get here. With only a few days notice, many interested individuals could not even arrange travel to get here from other parts of the state, let alone time off work or the expense of attending.

The nicely dressed and nicely organized supporters of this bill are paid staff of an organization that is operating on an agenda. A ban on the ownership of exotic animals is only one step on that agenda. Only a brief search of the Internet will bring up a great deal of information on the goals or PAWS and similar organizations.

The goal of banning exotic ownership has been repeatedly attempted here in Washington by these same individuals, year after year. The supporters of this bill have had lots and lots of advance notice, time to prepare and can present a full campaign.

Today, it is tigers, lions, big snakes and other exotic animals. Tomorrow it is the German Shepherd, Pit Bull and crowing rooster some of us also own.

The supporters of this bill feel justified in using extreme incidents in support of their desire to ban ownership. For example, after 30 years of entertainment using tigers in the act, Roy Horn was recently hurt in an accident. That accident has been pointed to as a reason for bans, ignoring the 30 years of accident free activity and completely refusing to hear of an actual investigation to discover what occurred so as to correct the problem. The incident is simply used as grist for a ban.

Animal rights groups are willing to spend 2 million on a 30 second ad during the Super Bowl, insinuating meat eating men are not sexually satisfying to women (see attached API). Or put the image of Jesus Christ on a billboard and call him a vegetarian or run a slogan of "GOT BEER".

We have no slick promotion or heady slogans.

The supporters of this bill have extremely few incidents to use in support of this bill. The costs of this bill are outrageous and unnecessary. Allowing the matter to be dealt with at county level, based on county needs as perceived by the individual county is the only fair way to deal with the matter. Thurston County is different than King County.

There is no evidence whatsoever that the matter of exotic animals must become a matter for the state. The counties are in fact currently regulating as they see fit.

Thank you,
Jeanne Hall
President
Phoenix Exotic Wildlife Association

WA 1151 Hearing

January 16, 2004

Intro

At it again, bill supporters assured the committee that they had changed the bill as needed to address issues raised with the bill's previous version. In an attempt to alleviate the cost concerns of counties and cities, for example, the requirement to become permitted was reduced to becoming registered. A number of the supporters of the bill stated that the bill is a good bill and a "Good step toward the elimination of ownership." The usual pro-ban arguments were made and combated by both sides.

Summary of arguments with comments from both sides:

1.) **Lists of incidents stated. Roy's accident. NY city tiger-proof of need for bans.**

2.) **Diseases capable of being transmitted to humans.**

3.) **Unnatural behavior of keeping animals as pets.**

~"They are completely inappropriate as companion pets," said Jennifer Hillman, campaign and legislative coordinator for Lynwood's Progressive Animal Welfare Society. "If Roy Horn, who had over 44 years of experience handling tigers, isn't safe, who is?"

~John Lussmyer of Whidbey Island gave emotional testimony, likening his bobcats, ages 23 and 25, to family members. "I just don't see the point of forcing people not to own pets -- especially if they take good care of them," Lussmyer said.

4.) **Facilities did nothing toward conservation.**

5.) **Insurance.**

~Jeanne covered the point that insurance is still being listed as a requirement, yet is STILL not available.

6.) **White tiger not an endangered species.(The admission that the white tiger was slated for "manage to extinction was made.**

7.) **PAWS rep made statements that a black bear escaped from his cage and was at large until recaptured.**

~The bear is owned by a Phoenix member. Jeanne counteracted the statements with facts that the bear was never outside of its full enclosure, but did climb out of its primary enclosure onto the roof. A perimeter fence was around the primary enclosure. The bear was never outside of the perimeter cage and was easily returned to the primary cage.

~PAWS also mentioned an 81 year old man being killed by an ostrich. Jeanne clarified that the man had suffered a heart attack. When PAWS representatives offered to provide a newspaper article that stated the man's heart may have played a part, Jeanne verified that her information came from the man's own daughter.

8.) **AZA accredited facilities are exempted again.**

~Jeanne stated AZA is a private club and that singling them out for special treatment sets up a privileged class. Also, ISZ should have equal footing.

~Jeanne mentioned that FCF is working on an accreditation system as well as Phoenix. The Herp Society has specific requirements in place currently as does Falconry.

Opponents of the bill

~Rep. Mike Carrell, R-Tacoma, the ranking minority member of the judiciary committee, expressed concern about the over regulation of pets.

~County sheriffs and U.S. fish and wildlife officials were opposed to shouldering the regulatory responsibility. In Washington state, animal control is handled at the local level. When there is no animal control, sheriffs are charged with enforcing ordinances. "When you have an agency that is called 'Fish and Wildlife,' why don't you let them deal with it?" Lewis County Sheriff John McCloskey asked. "We're not gonna dance around with an animal that eats you." Bruce Bjork, chief of enforcement for the fish and wildlife, testified that he had only 105 officers statewide to cover a broad range of areas unrelated to animal control. Cowlitz County Sheriff Bill Mahoney added that he would rather send a deputy to track down a sexual predator than inspect a kennel.

Final Notes:

~Committee asked Jeanne about addressing the issue on a case by case bases. Jeanne agreed by admitting that we have problem owners/animals and that a case by case would be very supported. Jeanne reminded the committee that we thought we had that agreement last year after we left the first hearing. It still turned out to be entire species.

~After the hearing, Lovick was convinced that, despite the heated differences, there exists a desire on all sides to improve laws surrounding wild animals.

~One thing that clearly came out of the debate was not the question, 'Should we regulate?' but rather, 'How should we regulate?'"

~In light of the testimony, Lovick said that he would consider revisiting whose jurisdiction the bill's enforcement falls under.

~In a later hearing, people representing the Association of Cities, Association of Counties and City of Everett, which contracts to a number of cities for Animal Control showed up to speak, unexpectedly. Since the job of permitting and such is to be done by cities and counties, the financial impact fell on them. They strongly opposed and suggested the state pay for it.

Jeanne Hall - Transcript of Testimony

I'm Jeanne Hall. I'm president of Phoenix Wildlife Society. Actually Wildlife Association is what we are called and before I go into what I want to say, could I clarify a couple of things that I've heard?

One is on the black bear that was running free. He happens to be a member and the black bear was actually on top of a primary enclosure, still within his closure. He was never 'at large.'

The 81 year old guy that was killed by the ostrich wasn't. He had a heart attack in the ostrich cage. So, he wasn't actually killed by the ostrich. Ok?

Just to hit a few quick points. We don't normally give the number of our members. They just like to remain anonymous, but we could probably hit 40,000 because we cover the Simian Society, the Herp Society, falconers, cat groups, dog groups, domestic dogs, domestic cats, etcetera. They all come together trying to work together on issues like this.

The information that you are hearing from the people that want to push this bill. They clearly say they want to eliminate ownership. At no point do they really say: this is public safety, this is animal welfare. They want to eliminate ownership.

This bill keeps coming back year after year after year and they cut this out and they add this back. They change this. They leave the insurance, which is completely unavailable. There are no companies offering this insurance. There's one in Florida that used to. The gentleman called. They said no. They won't give it to you. But, every year, it comes back.

This is an 'eliminate ownership' bill. And prior to doing that, I would just ask that a legitimate study be done, that the owners be looked at, the animals be looked at. Who is really doing this? Are there really 15,000 tigers or are there 3? Is there 1% danger or is there 100% danger? Really see what it is.

We're just like you guys. We have animals and some of our kids are allergic to dogs and cats. They have a snake. Another kid is terrorized by dogs and cats. He has a rat. I know people that are in love with their spiders. This is an issue that may or may not have a need of this kind of a state wide bill. I don't see it. Kitsip county bans all exotics. Thurston has some kind of regulation. Other areas have some sort of regulation, but there should be room in Washington, Kitsip for me to have my weird animals and for these people over here to say no, we don't want any in our county. If we try to change this to a statewide ruling, we are saying Washington is all the same everywhere. It isn't. We have different areas, different people and it is really a local issue.

I gave you a written summary. You guys can read that. I won't read it again. I did want to mention on the AZA, where that's been exempted if you're licensed by AZA, that's a private group. It is NOT a government organization. There's another group called the International Society of Zoologists, which probably has more members than the AZA. They don't agree with the AZA, but they're zoos. Putting in the AZA as the ONLY regulating authority and ignoring ISZ sets up a privilege class of public citizens. It's not like saying the government is going to issue certification. It is saying the AZA, it could as easily say Phoenix.

As far as dealing with the problems we have, we do see we have problems: dog ownership, cat ownership, kids, everything has it's problems. There are a number of groups that do self-regulate. The Feline Conservation Federation is a national group and they're looking into accreditation. Phoenix is looking into accreditation. The falconry group that is pretty well known have their own accreditation. They have their own requirements. The Herp Society has theirs. The Simian Society has guidelines. All of these groups individually address various forms of animal ownership. In making this decision, it would be good to have their input, look at what they have, look at their documents. Look at their successes. Look at their losses. Look at their animals and then make the decision. That's all I have to say.

A point to be made by Ray Rooney

To place this in perspective we need to understand how this came to be.

Originally there were no licenses. Animal control, such as it was, mainly concerned with picking up dead or abandoned animals. Renderers and knackers did most of this.

Dogs were dealt with by property owners if they trespassed and caused problems.

As population density increased the problem grew to the point where there were conflicts over ownership of animals picked up off the streets. A system of REGISTRATION was started in many places. This allowed animals to be matched with owners and the assurance of claims of ownership.

As things continued to grow voluntary and charitable registries became unwieldy and centralized records were set up. This meant someone (or more than one) was doing this tracking full time and had to be paid and backed up.

So registration fees were started to pay for the system.

As the system grew and needed greater resources (pounds, wagons, more people) resistance to paying the fees set in and laws were passed requiring the registration (licensing) of the required animals.

As time wore on the types of animals that could be licensed and returned if found loose on the streets was reduced. Pigs were among the first to go. A new category - livestock - was created and they were forbidden to be found loose in public upon threat of fine or forfeit.

Now we have the system tightened to the point where licensing carries requirements and limits. Many places now refuse to license dogs in certain areas and set a limit on how many dogs any owner can have - regardless of property size. Many also require spaying and neutering of even purebred stock or require USDA licensing as a condition of keeping intact animals or higher license fees for them (or both).

Los Angeles has added a system to take tips from informers about possible unlicensed dogs or unlicensed breeding (kennels, as they label it.)

So where does this put exotics?

Since there is no pattern of leopards or zebras being found wandering the streets and having to be held for reclaiming or adopting registration or licensing serves only to place burdens and blockages on their owners.

Existing zoning laws already forbid such creatures (and the domestic horse, pig, cow, etc.) in most residential areas and virtually all cities. Those alone are sufficient to control the nut who wants a giraffe in the back yard of his brownstone.

To understand why "licenses" are wanted one merely needs to understand the origin of the term. A license was an exemption granted by a lord or religious official to someone to do something FORBIDDEN in the normal day-to-day life of an underling.

If a license is required for some object or activity then that thing is not a right but a privilege and subject to denial or the setting of any condition the licensing body may decide is desired.

Thus has ownership of even a dog been reduced to a conditional privilege in most areas and one denied entirely in some places.

With this example before us is there any wonder we resist the imposition of similar restrictions state and nation-wide? No benefit to be derived indeed.

Sadly enough this law is not new or unique. In fact, it is a rewrite (slight) of a bill that was pushed nationally a few years ago as the Shambala Bill, named for the operation in CA run by activist and failed actress Tippi Hedren (The Birds, Marni) who was it and its successors chief lobbyist.

The bill in WA was written by CA animal rights activists API (Animal Protection Institute) and allied organizations. It is being submitted around the country and people in other states should keep their eyes and ears open for its appearance in their state.

Animal ownership - a federal crime?

Imagine taking a job in another state and finding that taking the family pet with you made you a criminal - a federal criminal.

Sound far-fetched? It is not. On Halloween eve of this year the senate passed SB.269 which establishes just such a situation. Yes, it is for animals that nobody likes but the same people behind that bill don't like you having a dog or cat either.

A syndicate of animal liberation people - including known Animal Liberation Front (ALF) backers such as PETA - the so-called Captive Wild Animal Protection Coalition wrote and got a bill sponsored for themselves - The Captive Wild Animal Protection Act which does nothing of the sort but does establish one federally-approved and protected class of owners - the sponsors themselves.

And is passed through the senate without a word against it or even a VOTE!

If your property rights can be voted away like this where could it ever stop? People hate all sorts of things we own and the door is now wide open for this ploy to be used against them all - guns, trucks, and anything in private hands.

We don't need terrorists from outside to take our rights, our own terrorists are doing it through the legislative process with the help of our elected officials.

All of these need to be fought. Some are outright bad and others are obvious first moves in a bigger game.

Ray Rooney