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FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
Rachel Querry: (301) 258-8255

**THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES URGES HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES TO PASS BILL RESTRICTING PRIVATE  
OWNERSHIP OF EXOTIC PETS**

***HSUS Applauds Rep. George Miller for Introducing Legislation***

WASHINGTON – The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the nation’s largest animal protection organization, is urging the U.S. House of Representatives to pass the “Captive Wildlife Safety Act,” introduced late yesterday by Rep. George Miller (D-CA-7th), the senior Democrat on the House Resources Committee. The legislation, H.R. 5226, is backed by The HSUS, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, and the International Fund for Animal Welfare. It would ban interstate shipments of lions, tigers, and bears for the pet trade.

“There is no justifiable reason for a person to have a tiger or a lion as a pet,” said Wayne Pacelle, HSUS senior vice president. “These are powerful and potentially dangerous animals, and they belong in the wild, not languishing in a dirty cage in someone's backyard in Arkansas or New Jersey or Ohio.”

The legislation seeks to amend the Lacey Act, which addresses shipments of fish and wildlife, by barring the interstate movement of dangerous exotics for use as pets. Facilities that operate under a U.S. Department of Agriculture permit, such as zoos and circuses, are exempt.

An estimated 5,000 tigers are in private hands in the United States – a population that likely surpasses the world’s wild tiger population. Ownership of wild, exotic animals seems to be on the rise, often with disastrous results:

- Lexington, Texas – A three-year-old boy is killed by his step-father’s “pet” tiger in October 2001.
- Channelview, Texas – A three-year-old boy made national headlines in March 2000 when his uncle’s pet Bengal tiger tore off part of the boy’s arm.
- Loxahatchee, Florida – A 58-year-old woman was critically injured after being bitten on the head by a 750-pound “pet” Siberian-Bengal tiger mix in February 2002.
- Animal control officers have been called in by police who find dangerous exotic animals guarding illegal drugs.
- The Houston SPCA has had to expand their facility to meet the unique needs of the large exotic animals they routinely receive as victims of cruelty and neglect. They’ve handled over 40 large cats in the last few years and just last week took in an African lion.

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Houston SPCA executive director Patricia Mercer thinks that federal legislation to ban interstate shipments would help to address the problem since she believes many of the animals the shelter cares for come from out of state.

Exotic animal dealers traffic in these animals, who are relatively easy and inexpensive to procure. Tiger cubs cost approximately \$350 to purchase, yet as full grown animals they can cost thousands of dollars to feed every month. Dealers of such animals feed the demand for exotic pets from people who seek the attention and notoriety that comes with owning a lion, tiger, or other dangerous exotic animal.

Once someone grows tired of the novelty or realizes that they can't properly care for the animal, they have few options for placing a full-grown exotic animal. The animals have no value to the conservation of wild species since they are often inbred and genetically inappropriate for breeding programs designed to restore wild populations. Zoos usually can't accommodate the animals. Often, the animals are neglected or are simply let loose.

"These animals cannot be humanely maintained by individuals without the resources or knowledge to care for these creatures," said Rep. Miller. "They have very specific physical, behavioral and nutritional needs that can only be met by professional curators at zoos that have the resources to meet the animals' needs while providing safe and secure housing."

"Wild animals, even if they are raised by hand from infancy, grow up to be unpredictable and dangerous," said Richard Farinato, director of captive wildlife protection for The HSUS. "No matter how well you think you might know an animal, there's always the potential of serious injury to yourself or someone else."

Twelve states currently ban private possession of large exotic animals and 7 states have partial bans. However, no federal law restricts sale or ownership of these animals.

A number of organizations oppose the ownership of dangerous exotic animals, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the American Veterinary Medical Association, and animal shelters across the country.

The HSUS is the nation's largest animal protection organization with over seven million members and constituents. The HSUS is dedicated to protecting all animals through legislation, education, investigation, litigation, advocacy and field work. The HSUS has active programs protecting wildlife, companion animals, farm animals and animals in research. The HSUS is headquartered in Washington, DC and has 10 regional offices. For more information, visit The HSUS' Web site at [www.hsus.org](http://www.hsus.org).