

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5065

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As of January 14, 2025

**Title:** An act relating to prohibiting the use of certain animals in traveling animal acts.

**Brief Description:** Prohibiting the use of certain animals in traveling animal acts.

**Sponsors:** Senators Liias, Lovick, Stanford, Bateman, Frame, Krishnadasan, Nobles, Riccelli and Saldaña.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Law & Justice: 1/14/25.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Creates a gross misdemeanor for the use of certain, nondomestic animal species in traveling animal acts.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE

**Staff:** Patrick Moore (786-7535)

**Background:** Traveling Animal Shows. Circuses and other entertainment organizations use animals such as lions, tigers, bears, elephants, and apes in performances for live audiences. The animals are displayed and may be made to perform tricks or give rides. These organizations travel to various sites to put on shows. For travel to sites for shows, the animals are often transported by truck, trailer, or railroad.

Penalty. A gross misdemeanor is subject to a term of imprisonment in the county jail for up to 364 days or a fine of up to \$5,000, or both, as determined by the court.

**Summary of Bill:** A traveling animal act is any display in which an animal is required to perform tricks, give rides, or accompany other entertainment for the benefit of a live audience, when the animal is transported between locations by vehicle for the purpose of

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performance.

The following animals are prohibited from being used in traveling animal acts before live audiences:

- elephants;
- bears;
- nonhuman primates;
- felines—excluding domestic cats; and
- hybrids of these species.

Allowing any prohibited animal to participate in a traveling animal act is punishable as a gross misdemeanor. Permanent facilities that do not travel are exempt from this prohibition unless a covered animal is transported to the permanent facility just for performance. Cities and counties are allowed to pass laws more restrictive than this prohibition.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 10, 2024.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Societies are measured by how they treat their most vulnerable, which includes animals. Traveling acts cannot provide wild animals what they need to maintain their health. Transporting large, exotic animals stresses them with inhumane conditions in confined spaces, exposed to the elements, and lacking socialization for long periods. These animals are often subjected to brutal training methods and coerced through fear. There are still circuses that travel to Washington and subject these animals to poor conditions. There are many facilities that treat animals with little or no standards, investigations frequently reveal acts of abuse. Animals have no choice in being subjected to these poor conditions. Exposing these stressed animals to the public creates risk of injury and such incidents have occurred. Over 50 countries, 11 other states, both red and blue, as well as six communities in Washington have banned this practice. There are ways to see wild animals in Washington where they are treated well, such as zoos. Circuses such as Ringling acknowledge that traveling animal acts are cruel and belong in the past. These performances create a false narrative that these animals are readily available in the wild and put on these performances willingly. Circuses can operate without wild animal shows, as such shows are a minor portion of their overall performances. This bill seeks not to disrupt similar, local ordinances. Permanent facilities are not impacted by this bill.

CON: Traveling animal events are a primary source of funds for some organizations that bring animals to children in schools who cannot afford to travel to certified animal facilities. Animals used in these activities choose whether or not to be involved. These

activities are covered by the U.S. Animal Welfare Act and other standards. Section 5 would allow municipalities to ban such activities. The definition of traveling animal acts is too broad. The practices this bill targets should be stopped under existing laws. Professional and certified animal trainers should be involved in legislation addressing the issue. Recognized cat breeds such as Bengals are crossbreeds between domestic cats and wild species, these should not be prohibited from traveling to events like cat shows.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Marko Liias, Prime Sponsor; Debora Munguia, Woodland Park Zoo; Vitaliy Kertchen; Wes Burdett; Amanda Fox, Animal Rights Initiative; Robert McCormick, Animal Defenders International.

CON: Debbie Goodrich, Flight Club Foundation; Rebecca Faust, N/A.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.