

Testimony on SB 658
House Agriculture Committee
Peter D'Arienzo, CEO
John Ball Zoo

Chairman Barrett, Minority Vice-Chair Elder, members of the committee, thank you for having this hearing on HB 5778. My name is Peter D'Arienzo, and I am the CEO of the John Ball Zoo. The John Ball Zoo is the 4th most attended cultural attraction in the state of Michigan with annual attendance from all 83 counties and 11 surrounding states. Our regional direct economic impact is over \$40 million per year. We are science-based non-profit and participate in 37 Species Survival Plans and 39 Scientific Taxon Advisory Groups. Our educational programs reach over 40,000 students per year. More people visit Zoos in the US each year than the combined attendance of professional baseball, basketball, football, and hockey.

I am here today to offer my full support for HB 5778 and gratitude to Rep. Albert for introducing this important piece of legislation. I won't go into the history of how we got here but will rather just state the obvious that the breeding of Large Carnivores in Michigan is currently illegal under state law. In our opinion, that was not the intent of the original bill, but regardless of how we feel about whether it is a good law or not, it is the law and we follow the law.

John Ball Zoo is a member of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums and has been longer than any other zoo in Michigan. It is a great organization and one of which we are proud to be a member. As a non-profit AZA member, we are very comfortable that the criteria based approach to allow for the breeding of large carnivores is the right approach and one that is contained in HB 5778. We also join with Binder Park Zoo in supporting this legislation.

We had tigers of breeding age at our zoo and have actively pursued legislation to fix the law, but have been unsuccessful to this point in changing the law. Last session saw a similar bill pass the Senate but we ran out of time. Unfortunately, late last year, we had to let our endangered tigers go to another institution out of state that allows for breeding. To us, the conservation of the species outweighed our ability to breed the animals and breaking the law was not an option we were willing to consider.

At John Ball Zoo, we take seriously our commitment to conservation and to ensuring that the blood lines of the animals we breed continue in a way that mimics what you would see in the wild.

Opponents will say why now and let's work on other ways to accomplish the goals of this bill. To them I say, we have been waiting for at least 3 years and have grown tired of the "no" mentality. It has gotten us nowhere until we put historical disagreements aside and sat down with Rep. Albert and Sen. Joe Hune to devise a fair system that allows qualified institutions to breed our tigers. We have waited and cannot wait anymore. The time to act is now.

The paramount purpose of this bill is the safety health and welfare of those visiting zoos and surrounding communities and the safety, health, welfare, and integrity of the animals that are breeding, including their offspring. It does that by setting a clear and thorough set of criteria that

does not seek to pick winners and losers, but rather allows institutions who can already hold and acquire large carnivores to also breed them. Many of the criteria that this bill includes comes directly from federal regulations and from organizations who are experts in the field.

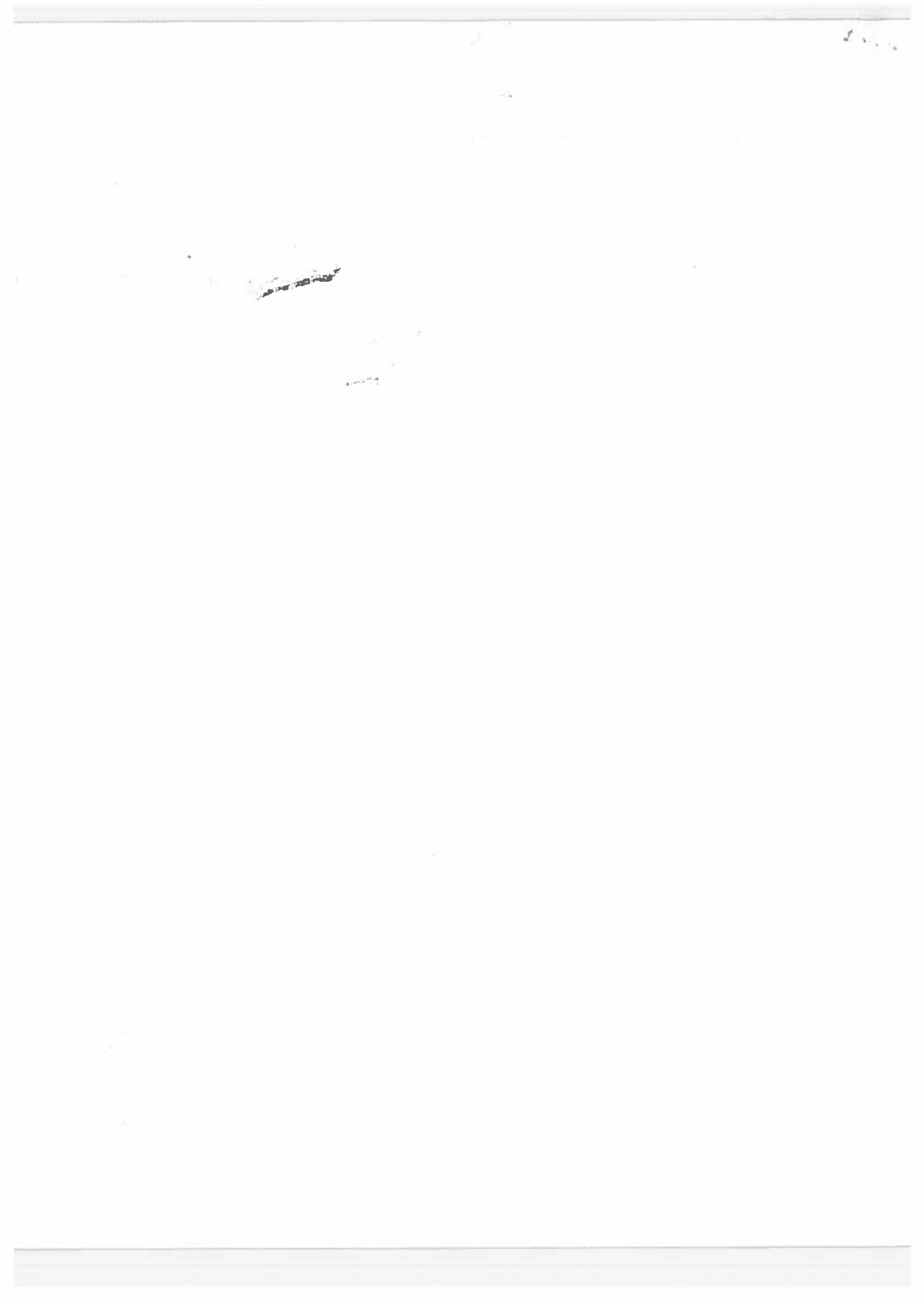
In brief, in order to breed a large carnivore, you must:

- Have proper housing for animals, including but not limited to proper climate control, emergency backup systems, complexity for increased animal welfare, animal choice in social interactions, and protection from disease and injury;
- Have emergency communication equipment and written protocols, including drills to be done onsite at least annually;
- Have proper veterinary care, including but not limited to, 24-hour care options, annual examinations and preventative care, not allowing disfiguring procedures or hand-rearing when not deemed necessary by a veterinarian, and adhering to humane euthanasia practices.
- Have a written animal acquisition, transfer, and disposition plan;
- Have a written plan for what happens if a significant drop in revenue occurs for the organization;
- Have a written plan for what happens to animals should the organization no longer remain financially solvent enough to care for them;
- Have a comprehensive institutional record-keeping system;
- Participate in science-based cooperative breeding programs whose goal is to maintain or increase the genetic diversity of the species in human care;
- Not transfer animals to a person not able to ensure its care and well-being, to a person selling them at an auction, or to a person that allows hunting of the large carnivores;
- Not raise and harvest an animal for its parts or transfer an animal to a person that would do so;
- Provides proper insurance coverage for staff, volunteers, visitors, and the facilities.
- Be approved by an Advisory Board made up of the State Veterinarian and experts from the two largest zoo accreditation organizations.

It is not our intent to allow anyone to have or breed a large carnivore that currently cannot have one under state or federal regulations. Any notion to the contrary is simply hyperbole designed to scare people into voting no on this important bill. If for some reason, someone can point to a loophole that would allow for anything different, then we are committed to working to tighten up the language.

Last session we heard reservations from the Department of Agriculture in regard to our approach. We have spent the last year working with them to formulate a bill that incorporated their concerns. I cannot speak for the position of the Department, but we feel very comfortable that our close work with them has resulted in an even better bill, and we are hopeful of hearing how they feel about the bill.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Tuesday, April 10, 2018

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John Ball Zoo urges Legislature to approve strong standards for breeding of large carnivores

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – The John Ball Zoo is calling on the Michigan Legislature to approve an amendment to the Large Carnivore Act. The amendment provides a strong regulatory framework for the breeding of large carnivores to promote conservation, safety and a uniform set of standards and oversight.

“Conservation breeding programs ensure the preservation of endangered species and large carnivores including tigers, bears and lions. We urge the House to approve this legislation to provide a strong regulatory framework that promotes the responsible breeding of large carnivores in the state,” said Peter D’Arienzo, John Ball Zoo CEO. “Changes in the new legislation will ensure high quality animal care and improve public safety. This framework will also provide high standards modeled on best practices, federal regulations and standards provided by leading accredited organizations.”

The Large Carnivore Act will ensure all zoos – public or private – maintain high standards and meet specific criteria to breed large carnivores in Michigan. Similar legislation passed in the Senate by a bipartisan group of elected leaders in December 2016, and then lost momentum. Supporters of this legislation include zoos across the state of Michigan, accredited organizations, elected officials and others.

“I strongly urge our elected officials to pass this legislation so we can ensure all wildlife, including large carnivores, can be preserved for future generations. The current act limits our Michigan zoos from fully participating in important species survival programs,” said Harold Voorhees, Kent County commissioner and former state representative.

The legislation will:

- Provide a framework for making sure animals receive high-quality care and ensure the responsible breeding of large carnivores.
- Put patron and animal safety first by requiring zoos that breed large carnivores to provide secure animal enclosures and habitats.
- Require zoos that want to breed a large carnivore to have proper housing and care for animals, emergency plans in place and trained staff.
- Ensure high standards for public and private zoos wishing to breed carnivores and prevent bad actors from mistreating animals or putting people at risk.

- Establish a three-person board that includes the State's Veterinarian to approve any organization that wishes to breed a large carnivore.

The breeding of large carnivores in Michigan is currently illegal under the Large Carnivore Act due to an unintentional drafting error that was codified into Michigan law. In 2017, John Ball Zoo relocated its male tigers to other zoos out of state. These animals are extremely valuable to species survival breeding programs. As John Ball Zoo could not legally breed them in Michigan, the move was required in order to help preserve the species for the future.

The proposed regulatory framework will require all Michigan zoos to maintain high standards and meet specific criteria to have a large carnivore breeding program.

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10 Frequently Asked Questions about the Large Carnivore Act

1. What is the Large Carnivore Act?

- The Large Carnivore Act promotes the responsible breeding of wildlife, including endangered species, for future generations.
- The amendment will create a regulatory framework that ensures all zoos – public or private – maintain high standards and meet specific criteria to breed large carnivores in Michigan.

2. Isn't it illegal to breed large carnivores in Michigan?

- Under the current act the breeding of Large Carnivores in Michigan is illegal due to an unintentional drafting error that was codified into Michigan law.
- This regulatory framework will require all Michigan zoos to maintain high standards and meet specific criteria in order to breed large carnivores.
- Most other states allow responsible breeding of large carnivores.

3. Why should zoos be allowed to breed large carnivores?

- Conservation breeding programs help ensure the preservation of endangered species and large carnivores including tigers, bears and lions.
- Conservation breeding programs help fulfill preserving species for the future.
- Research shows that animals thrive in environments that allow for natural behaviors. This legislation will improve animal health and welfare.
- The Large Carnivore Act amendment will promote the responsible conservation of wildlife, including endangered species, for future generations.

4. What are the proposed criteria for breeding a large carnivore?

- This legislation will ensure all zoos – public or private – maintain high standards and meet specific criteria to breed large carnivores in Michigan.
- This important legislation is modeled on best practices, federal regulations and accredited organizations.

- This legislation will ensure high standards for public and private zoos wishing to breed large carnivores by preventing bad actors from mistreating animals or putting people at risk.
- The legislation establishes a three-person board that includes the State of Michigan's veterinarian to approve any organization that wishes to breed a large carnivore.

5. Who will evaluate zoo breeding programs?

- The legislation will establish a three-person board that includes the State of Michigan's veterinarian to thoroughly evaluate any organization that wishes to breed a large carnivore.
- Federal laws require organizations that wish to breed large carnivores to be licensed by the USDA and have permits from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

6. How will this legislation ensure visitor safety?

- The Large Carnivore Act amendment will improve animal care and public safety.
- This legislation puts visitor and animal safety first by requiring zoos that breed large carnivores to provide secure animal enclosures and habitats and emergency procedures and protocols.

7. How will this legislation ensure animal safety?

- The Large Carnivore Act will foster high-quality animal care and encourage the safety and welfare of zoo patrons.
- This legislation provides a framework that allows for the responsible breeding of large carnivores and establishes high-quality care standards.
- To breed a large carnivore, zoos must have proper housing and high quality care for animals, emergency plans in place, and trained staff.

8. Why does John Ball Zoo support this legislation?

- John Ball Zoo is committed to the responsible conservation of wildlife, including endangered species, for future generations.

- Conservation breeding programs help ensure the preservation of endangered species and large carnivores including tigers, bears and lions.
- Conservation breeding programs are a key part of fulfilling our mission to help preserve species in the wild.
- We have already had to move two male breeding age Amur tigers because of the error in the current state law. We are committed to the responsible breeding of large carnivores, which is why we relocated our tigers in 2017.

9. How will these strong regulations prevent unethical breeding of large carnivores?

- This legislation will ensure high standards for public and private zoos wishing to breed large carnivores and prevent bad actors from mistreating animals or putting people at risk.
- The legislation establishes a three-person board that includes the State of Michigan's veterinarian to approve any organization that wishes to breed a large carnivore.

10. How does breeding support wildlife conservation?

- Conservation breeding programs help ensure the preservation of endangered species and large carnivores including tigers, bears and lions.
- Research shows that animals thrive in environments that allow for natural behaviors. This legislation will help encourage animal health and welfare.

Core Messages: Large Carnivore Act

- **The Large Carnivore Act amendment will promote the responsible breeding of wildlife, including endangered species, for future generations.**
 - Conservation breeding programs help ensure the preservation of endangered species and large carnivores including tigers, bears and lions.
 - Conservation breeding programs are a key part of the survival of many species. This is an important way zoos fulfill preserving animals for the future.
 - Research shows that animals thrive in environments that allow them to demonstrate natural behaviors. This legislation sets standards of care that will improve animal health and welfare.

- **The Large Carnivore Act amendment will foster high-quality animal care and improve public safety.**
 - This legislation provides a framework that allows for the responsible breeding of large carnivores and establishes high-quality care standards.
 - This legislation puts public and animal safety first by requiring zoos that breed large carnivores to provide secure animal enclosures and habitats.
 - To breed a large carnivore, zoos must have proper housing and care for animals, emergency plans in place and trained staff.

- **This legislation will ensure all zoos – public or private – maintain high standards and meet specific criteria to breed large carnivores in Michigan.**
 - This important legislation is modeled off of best practices, federal regulations and accredited organizations.
 - This legislation will ensure high standards for public and private zoos wishing to breed large carnivores and will prevent bad actors from mistreating animals or putting people at risk.
 - The legislation establishes a three-person board that includes the State of Michigan’s veterinarian to approve any organization that wishes to breed a large carnivore.

