

H.R. 7159, PROTECTING LOCAL ZOOS ACT OF 2026

Supported By: Feline Conservation Foundation, Zoological Association of America

WHAT DOES THE BILL DO?

- ***Provides commonsense clarification on who can care for big cats and enter enclosures***

Why? This enables duly trained volunteers to have contact with the animals in their care, including volunteer medical professionals and professional researchers, and facility owners.

- ***Provides opportunity to cancel mistaken registration***

Why? The guidance on who should register for an exemption under the BCPSA is confusing and has misguided some facilities. There are registered owners who operate active USDA licensed businesses that continue to take in more big cats, though they are strictly prohibited from doing so, clearly having registered in error.

- ***Clarifies export and import regulations***

Why? In the interim rule from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), "Regulations to Implement the Big Cat Public Safety Act," published on June 12, 2023, FWS indicates that big cats may not be exported except for release by foreign governments because the U.S. cannot confirm that facilities overseas meet the standards set by Congress in the BCPSA. This interpretation is overly broad, and clarification is needed.

- ***Brings parity between Class B and Class C license holders***

Why? The BCPSA currently exempts USDA C licensees (animal exhibitors), while Class B licensees (brokers, researchers, and operators of auction sales who do not have members of public on site) are not exempt. Class B and C licensees undergo the same inspection process for animal welfare.

- ***Clarifies clouded leopards (*Neofelis nebulosa*) and snow leopards (*Uncia uncia*) were not included in the Captive Wildlife Safety Act***

Why? The Captive Wildlife Safety Act of 2003 (PL 108-191), defined covered species as "(A) any live species of lion, tiger, leopard, cheetah, jaguar, or cougar; and (B) any live hybrid of any of those species." In the June 2023 interim rule, FWS interpreted PL 108-191 to mean, "Lions, tigers, leopards, snow leopards, clouded leopards, jaguars, cheetahs, and cougars"; "all subspecies of these species" and "any hybrid combination of these species." The inclusion of snow leopards and clouded leopards occurs only because the word "leopard" is part of the species' names. Because the BCPSA changes were only reflecting the FWS practice and not the original law passed by Congress, the BCPSA codified the prior overreach of FWS.

BOTTOM LINE

The ***Protecting Local Zoos Act of 2026*** closes loopholes in the BCPSA to ease the regulatory burden on small and independently owned zoos and protect the public's access to the beauty of big cats.

With questions or to cosponsor, contact Macayle.Fuchs@mail.house.gov