

September 15, 2017

Ethan Strimling, Mayor of Portland
 Portland City Council Members

Via e-mail

Dear Mayor Strimling and Councilors,

I'm writing on behalf of PETA and its 9,000 members in Portland to urge you to support Order 30-17/18, an ordinance to prohibit the display of wild and exotic animals in circuses and other traveling shows in Portland.

Last week, police gunned down a tiger named Suzy in a Georgia neighborhood after she was spotted attacking a dog. Authorities searched for the person responsible for the tiger's escape, only to learn—many hours later—that Suzy had been in the custody of Feld Entertainment, the parent company of the now-defunct Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. She had escaped unnoticed from a truck that was stopped at a rest area in the middle of the night.

When Suzy escaped, Feld was in the process of transporting her and more than a dozen other big cats across the country. The company didn't even realize that she was missing until the vehicle reached its destination in another state hours later, when circus personnel heard reports that a tiger had been shot dead. This story represents the traveling animal-entertainment industry to a T: inept to the detriment of the animals.

An elephant named Kelly was lucky to survive a similar bid for freedom this summer, after another elephant removed her chains overnight, allowing her to escape from a barn, cross a river, and wander through residents' backyards. Her trainers with the [Carson & Barnes Circus](#)—which typically provides an elephant act to the Kora Shrine Circus in Portland—didn't even know she was missing.

This wasn't Kelly's first attempt to flee from a life in chains. Just last year, Carson & Barnes was ordered to pay a \$16,000 fine to settle a lawsuit filed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture after Kelly and two other elephants became frightened by a noisy audience at a Shrine circus and ran amok for 45 minutes—sustaining injuries and damaging property in the process.

Other wild animals exploited for entertainment have lashed out in frustration and injured humans. Just last fall, a young tiger named Gandhi latched onto a trainer's leg and dragged her along the ground at a performance. The woman—a former Ringling Bros. circus trainer—and her husband were filmed violently [whipping the tiger](#) repeatedly until he let go.

Since 1990, [dangerous interactions](#) with captive wild animals have resulted in dozens of human deaths and hundreds of catastrophic injuries—including severed limbs, broken bones, crushed pelvises, collapsed and punctured lungs, degloving injuries, head wounds, and brain injuries. It should never be a surprise when a powerful wild animal behaves like one. But the animals who respond instinctively to their surroundings will always pay the price for it—just as Gandhi and Suzy did.

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These incidents demonstrate that no amount of training can overcome a wild animal's natural instincts, even though circus trainers use barbaric methods to subjugate them. The head trainer of Carson & Barnes Circus was caught on [video](#) viciously attacking elephants with a bullhook—a sharp weapon resembling a fireplace poker, which is used to jab, strike, and intimidate elephants—and shocking them with electric prods during a training session, causing them to scream in pain.

Another Carson & Barnes trainer, who presents elephant acts with the [Garden Bros. Circus](#)—which tours in Maine and visited Portland under the name "Piccadilly Circus"—was [filmed](#) at a performance venue using a bullhook to yank the ear of an elephant named Libby as he screamed vulgarities at her. Additional video [footage](#) depicts him shocking elephants with a "hot shot" hidden in his pocket, yanking and jabbing elephants with a bullhook, and struggling to subdue an elephant by hitting her with a bullhook after she escaped from his control and attacked another animal.

Other animals used in circuses fare no better. Just this year, an exhibitor with Garden Bros. was [cited](#) for repeatedly whipping a llama onstage when the animal balked at performing a difficult trick. And in 2014, the manager of this circus was [cited](#) for failing to provide a camel who had puncture wounds and dried blood on her leg with veterinary care. A whistleblower who came forward this year [reported](#) witnessing a trainer with Garden Bros. whip camels' feet—sometimes drawing blood—and said that alligators used as photo props were kept in plastic crates with their mouths taped shut and fed very little to stunt their growth. Reportedly, they often died after only a couple of weeks.

Animals are not photo props, they shouldn't be used for rides at carnivals, and they're not willing participants in circuses. That's why the public is demanding animal-free entertainment, and a growing number of circuses are heeding that call. In the [words](#) of Kora Shrine Circus producer James Hamid, "As we look into the future, we see all circuses moving to non-animal productions."

Portland is poised to take the lead in advancing animal protection. I urge you to support this humane ordinance. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Very truly yours,



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