

Vote **YES** on House Bill 112/Senate Bill 344

PROTECT CAPTIVE WILD ANIMAL MOTHERS AND THEIR BABIES



HB 112/SB 344 would amend § 29.1-417 of the Code of Virginia to add the following vital protections:

- It would prohibit the premature separation of any baby wild mammals from their mother before the offspring turn 4 months of age, except when medically necessary pursuant to a written order from a veterinarian.
 - This provision would **not** apply to non-commercial transfers or trades between accredited zoological facilities, nor does it apply to accredited zoological facilities that retain the offspring.
 - The bills exempt agricultural animals as well as persons operating under a wildlife rehabilitator, scientific collection, or endangered/threatened species permit or a species recovery plan approved by the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR). The bills also exempt DWR as well as the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.
 - The legislation was amended to specify that rendering emergency neonatal aide—including temporary separation of up to 72 hours until a licensed veterinarian can be engaged for assessment and treatment—is not prohibited.
- It would prohibit the intentional breeding of wild mammals of different species, also known as hybridization.

Senate Bill 344 passed the Senate on February 9 by a vote of 36 to 14, and House Bill 112 passed the House on February 10 by a vote of 71 to 27.

Similar legislation (SB 1125, sponsored by Senator Boysko) passed both chambers last year but was vetoed by Governor Youngkin. Within days of the veto, two giraffe calves born at the Natural Bridge Zoo (NBZ) vanished and are still missing. The roadside zoo was found by a judge and a jury (in two separate proceedings) to have subjected dozens of animals to cruel treatment or deprived them of adequate care, and custody of the mother giraffes had been awarded to Rockbridge County before the two calves were born. In February 2026, Natural Bridge Zoo's current and former owner/operators, the facility's former attending veterinarian, and Asha the elephant's "trainer" were indicted by a Rockbridge County grand jury on a total of **55 counts of torturing, overdriving or cruelty to animals** and a total of **eight felony counts of forgery of a public record**.

The NBZ has a decades-long history of selling prematurely separated baby animals. The *Cardinal News* reported that "in the 10 years before the [Virginia State Police] raid, the zoo shipped 53 baby animals." These include a **3-day-old capuchin monkey** as well as several others who were just

HB 112/SB 344 is supported by the following organizations:

- Animal Partisan
- Association of Zoos & Aquariums
- FOUR PAWS USA
- Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries
- People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
- Virginia Alliance for Animal Shelters
- Virginia Association of Licensed Veterinary Technicians
- Virginia Federation of Humane Societies
- Virginia Veterinary Medical Association



A baby capuchin (left) at an "exotic" animal dealer that has accepted infant animals from Natural Bridge Zoo

2 to 3 weeks old when they were shipped to a primate dealer in Tennessee. In the last decade, NBZ has sent at least **14 infant giraffes under 8 weeks old** to other roadside zoos and animal dealers around the country.

PREMATURE MATERNAL SEPARATION

Animals who are separated from their mothers before their natural weaning age often suffer from developmental trauma, such as an increase in self-injurious behavior, aggression, immune deficiency, and anxiety. Despite the clear and ample scientific evidence of the detrimental effects of disrupting the mother-infant bond prematurely, infants are routinely taken away from their mothers absent medical necessity when they're only weeks, days, or sometimes just *hours* old to be sold as novelty "exotic pets," used in traveling menageries as photo-op attractions, or kept by collectors or in roadside zoos, where the breeding and dangerous premature maternal separation cycle continues.

Natural Bridge Zoo is not the only facility in the Commonwealth known to have profited from this cruel practice. Other animal breeders in the Commonwealth have taken babies away from their mothers solely to be exploited for entertainment and profit, sentencing those animals to a lifetime of psychological suffering, weakened immune function, and diminished survival skills that could largely be prevented by simply allowing young animals to be nursed and raised by their mothers whenever possible. A Berryville-based petting zoo has repeatedly sent young animals to multiple "exotic" animal auctions, including a **2-day-old cavy** and a **6-day-old capybara** to such a sale in Missouri. Another Natural Bridge roadside zoo sent a **3-week-old giraffe** to a dealer in Texas, and roadside zoos in Leesburg and Vienna have sent **months-old** zebras, primates, kangaroos, and other wild animals to out-of-state roadside attractions, dealers, and auction sales.



"One of the most critical features of the early environment in most mammalian species is the interaction between the primary caregiver and the offspring. ...

There is now abundant evidence that disruptions of the mother-infant relationships early in development have long-term consequences."

—Seymour Levine and Tara Mody, "The Long-Term Psychobiological Consequences of Intermittent Postnatal Separation in the Squirrel Monkey"



HYBRIDIZATION

When captive facilities purposefully hybridize different species, the offspring often have shortened life expectancies and are more prone to suffering from neurological disorders, physical deformities, and debilitating diseases. Experts assert that the hybridization of two species who would naturally live in different regions and never reproduce in the wild can have negative implications for a hybrid animal's psychological and developmental health and welfare.

**PLEASE VOTE YES ON
HB 112/SB 344 TO PROTECT
CAPTIVE WILDLIFE.**

For questions or additional information,
please e-mail DaphnaN@peta.org.

Thank you!

