



LOS ANGELES COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION

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May 15, 2025

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL

The Honorable City Council of the City of Los Angeles
Room 395, City Hall
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Letter in Support of Retiring Billy and Tina to a Sanctuary

Dear Honorable Councilmembers:

The Animal Law Section of the Los Angeles County Bar Association writes to express our unequivocal and urgent support to transfer Billy and Tina—the last two remaining elephants at the Los Angeles Zoo—to an accredited elephant sanctuary, to end the elephant breeding program, and not to acquire additional elephants.

The suffering that elephants endure at Zoos is a direct consequence of conditions we now understand to be scientifically and ethically indefensible. Science has confirmed that elephants are among the most intelligent creatures on earth, with brains similar to humans' but three times larger. Elephants communicate through a rich array of sounds, rumbles and body movements – and even use unique vocalizations to call each other by name. Elephants are emotionally complex, highly social beings who form strong bonds with other elephants and create self-governing communities. They exhibit empathy, flinch in anticipation of other elephants' pain, and engage in ceremonial rituals similar to humans when grieving the loss of a loved one. They are also playful, being known to play practical jokes on friendly humans.

Importantly, elephants have evolved to walk many miles each day over leafy, pasture-like surfaces, socializing, getting exercise, and foraging for trees and foliage. When confined to a few acres at a zoo, they are instead required to walk repeatedly over the same ground, thereby compacting the dirt and sand to the point where it is as hard as concrete. This unnatural surface causes cracks in the elephants' foot pads and painful osteoarthritis, which can lead to lameness and death. Moreover, because zoo elephants have no choice but to walk over their own urine and feces, zoo elephants are prone to abscesses and osteomyelitis, a painful bacterial infection that causes elephants' bones to disintegrate, again leading to lameness and death.

The emotional trauma elephants suffer as a result of captivity in a zoo is profoundly distressing. Billy and Tina both exhibit repetitive, functionless swaying, rocking and head bobbing, which are not natural behaviors of elephants. They are clear signs of "zoochosis," a form of psychosis (a severe psychological disorder), caused by prolonged confinement in small, barren environments, being deprived of social

bonds, being unable to engage in instinctive behaviors, and having no control over their lives. Psychosis is a terrifying and isolating experience, often marked by intense confusion, fear and a sense of being utterly overwhelmed. It is described as one of the most painful and upsetting existential experiences, utterly foreign to normal patterns of thought and life.

Retiring Billy and Tina to an elephant sanctuary is not a radical position—it is a mainstream, compassionate, and evidence-based approach to address the inherent cruelty of their confinement. Thirty-eight zoos in California and across North America have voluntarily closed their elephant exhibits, recognizing that no matter their efforts and no matter how large their elephant exhibits, zoos simply are not able to meet the physical or psychological needs of elephants.

Harvard Law School Professor Laurence Tribe (one of the nation's preeminent constitutional scholars), and two judges from New York State's highest court, are among the many legal experts who have argued that keeping elephants in zoos is inherently cruel and inhumane, and that they should be retired to sanctuaries. The City of Ojai outlawed keeping elephants confined at zoos via an ordinance titled "Right to Bodily Liberty for Elephants." Even developing nations have begun granting the compassionate release of elephants in captivity, including the Islamabad High Court's Order transferring Kaavan, an elephant who had been at the Marghazar Zoo in Pakistan for over three decades to a sanctuary, and the Bombay High Court's Order to relocate Sundar, a temple elephant in India, to the Bannerghatta Biological Park.

After presiding over a week-long trial, the highly-esteemed California Court of Appeal Justice John Segal, who was then a Superior Court judge, found that zoo captivity was "injuring the three elephants" who lived there (Billy, Tina, and Jewel), was "not a happy place for elephants, nor is it for members of the public who go to the zoo and recognize that the elephants are neither thriving, happy, nor content," and that:

"Captivity is a terrible existence for any intelligent, self-aware species, which the undisputed evidence shows elephants are. To believe otherwise, as some high-ranking zoo employees appear to believe, is delusional. And the quality of life that Billy, Tina and Jewel endure in their captivity is particularly poor."

In a sad twist of irony, his decision was reversed on the legal technicality that *criminal behavior* is not enforceable through a civil lawsuit.

Billy's and Tina's physical ailments are severe, their mental distress is undeniable, and their situation is dire. Do not allow them to become further statistics. We urge you to take swift actions to retire them to a sanctuary so that they can recover and live the rest of their lives with dignity in an environment far more suitable to their needs. We urge you to show the world that Los Angeles is a leader in compassion, in science, and in justice.

Thank you, in advance, for putting an end to this cruel and unnecessary suffering taking place at zoos.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Rachel E. Hobbs". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rachel Hobbs
Co-Chair, Animal Law Section
Los Angeles County Bar Association