

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 3456

To amend the Animal Welfare Act to prohibit keeping elephants in captivity at zoological parks or safari parks, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 15, 2025

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Agriculture

A BILL

To amend the Animal Welfare Act to prohibit keeping elephants in captivity at zoological parks or safari parks, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Captivity of Helpless
5 Elephants Reduction Act of 2025” or the “CHER Act of
6 2025”.

7 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS; PURPOSE.**

8 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds the following:

9 (1) Elephants live in a matriarchal hierarchy
10 where a lead female leads a large herd in the wild

1 and migrates, traveling hundreds of miles every
2 year. African and Asian elephants have been dem-
3 onstrated to possess, amongst other things, inten-
4 tional communication and learning, memory, and
5 categorization abilities. An Emory University experi-
6 ment showed that a female elephant seemed to rec-
7 ognize herself in a mirror, a result attributed to self-
8 awareness only seen otherwise in humans, dolphins,
9 and chimpanzees.

10 (2) Captivity does not provide for the needs of
11 normal elephant behavior and reproduction. As a re-
12 sult, captive elephants suffer both physical and emo-
13 tional trauma including hernias, arthritis, mental
14 degradation, and high calf mortality. The average
15 lifespan of a captive elephant is 17 years; in the
16 wild, elephants can live for 50 years or more.

17 (3) It is estimated that the cost of caring for
18 an elephant in captivity can be up to \$100,000 per
19 year. In 2004, the Detroit Zoo became the first
20 major American zoo to shut down its elephant ex-
21 hibit on ethical grounds. In 2006, the Bronx Zoo an-
22 nounced that it would close its exhibit once its three
23 elephants died. Since the early 1990s, more than 22
24 zoos have shut down their elephant exhibits or an-

1 nounced that they were phasing them out, including
2 those in Seattle, San Francisco, and Chicago.

3 (4) The United Kingdom phased out all cir-
4 cuses featuring wild animal performances by 2020
5 and announced its intention to ban the captivity of
6 elephants in zoos and safari parks. Dozens of other
7 countries around the world have similar prohibitions,
8 including Austria, Greece, Israel, Mexico, Peru, and
9 Singapore. India bans the keeping of elephants in
10 circuses and zoos.

11 (b) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this Act is to ban the
12 display, husbandry, and breeding of African elephants and
13 Asian elephants in zoological parks and safari parks in
14 the United States and transfer existing African elephants
15 and Asian elephants in zoological parks and safari parks
16 to authorized wildlife sanctuaries.

17 **SEC. 3. PROHIBITION ON ELEPHANT CAPTIVITY.**

18 The Animal Welfare Act (7 U.S.C. 2131 et seq.) is
19 amended by adding at the end the following:

20 **“SEC. 30. PROHIBITION ON ELEPHANT CAPTIVITY.**

21 “(a) IN GENERAL.—An exhibitor that is a safari park
22 or zoological park may not exhibit, house, manage, or
23 breed an African elephant or an Asian elephant after the
24 date that is 1 year after the date of the enactment of this

1 section, except to complete a transfer of an African ele-
2 phant or an Asian elephant pursuant to subsection (b).

3 “(b) TRANSFER TO AUTHORIZED WILDLIFE SANC-
4 TUARIES.—The Secretary shall require each exhibitor that
5 is a safari park or zoological park that exhibits, houses,
6 manages, or breeds an African elephant or an Asian ele-
7 phant as of the date of the enactment of this section to
8 transfer such African elephant or Asian elephant to an
9 authorized wildlife sanctuary not later than 3 years after
10 the date of the enactment of this section.

11 “(c) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

12 “(1) AFRICAN ELEPHANT.—The term ‘African
13 elephant’ has the meaning given the term in section
14 2305 of the African Elephant Conservation Act (16
15 U.S.C. 4244).

16 “(2) AUTHORIZED WILDLIFE SANCTUARY.—The
17 term ‘authorized wildlife sanctuary’ means a non-
18 profit facility that—

19 “(A) is accredited by the Global Federa-
20 tion of Animal Sanctuaries or a similar body;

21 “(B) is dedicated to the lifelong care of
22 elephants;

23 “(C) does not—

24 “(i) breed animals;

25 “(ii) exhibit animals for profit; or

1 “(iii) use animals for public entertain-
2 ment; and

3 “(D) meets the standards promulgated
4 under this Act for—

5 “(i) space;

6 “(ii) veterinary care; and

7 “(iii) naturalistic environments.

8 “(3) SAFARI PARK.—The term ‘safari park’
9 means a facility, whether publicly or privately
10 owned, that—

11 “(A) houses animals in large enclosures for
12 public viewing; and

13 “(B) allows visitors to drive through or ob-
14 serve animals in a simulated natural environ-
15 ment.

16 “(4) ZOOLOGICAL PARK.—The term ‘zoological
17 park’—

18 “(A) means a facility, whether publicly or
19 privately owned, that exhibits live animals to
20 the public for educational or entertainment pur-
21 poses; and

22 “(B) includes zoos and aquariums.”.

23 **SEC. 4. IMPLEMENTATION AND SUPPORT.**

24 (a) FEASIBILITY STUDY.—Not later than 1 year
25 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary

1 shall conduct a study to assess the feasibility of transfer-
2 ring African elephants and Asian elephants to authorized
3 wildlife sanctuaries, including capacity, costs, and logis-
4 ties.

5 (b) GRANT PROGRAM.—The Secretary may establish
6 a grant program to support the accommodation by author-
7 ized wildlife sanctuaries of African elephants and Asian
8 elephants transferred to such authorized wildlife sanc-
9 tuaries pursuant to section 30 of the Animal Welfare Act
10 (as added by this Act).

11 (c) PUBLIC EDUCATION.—The Secretary shall de-
12 velop materials to educate the public about the welfare
13 benefits of prohibiting the captivity of African elephants
14 and Asian elephants.

15 (d) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

16 (1) AFRICAN ELEPHANT.—The term “African
17 elephant” has the meaning given the term in section
18 2305 of the African Elephant Conservation Act (16
19 U.S.C. 4244).

20 (2) AUTHORIZED WILDLIFE SANCTUARY.—The
21 term “authorized wildlife sanctuary” has the mean-
22 ing given the term in section 30 of the Animal Wel-
23 fare Act (as added by this Act).

- 1 (3) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
2 the Secretary of Agriculture.

