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Joyce Poole, Director
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NORWAY

Joint Committee on Environment
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

Re: Bill to Protect Elephants in Traveling Shows and Circuses

Dear Joint Committee on Environment:

I urge your support for a bill to protect elephants in traveling shows and circuses introduced by Representative Diana Urban. This bill would make it unlawful to engage in inhumane or abusive treatment toward elephants.

I have attached my credentials on a separate page.

My opinions regarding the use of bullhooks

In my opinion the use of the use of the bullhook physically harms elephants. The bullhook is traditionally used on sensitive areas of the body. For example, a bullhook may be used behind the ears where the skin is paper thin, around the eyes where the skin is also very thin, and on the feet, trunk and around the mouth which are highly enervated. These areas are all extremely sensitive to the touch.

In my opinion the use of the use of the bullhook psychologically and emotionally harms elephants. People who use bullhooks often claim that these instruments are only a “guide”. In the wild dominance between elephants is based on age-dependent body size. Thus older, larger animals rank above smaller younger animals. The only way a human being (approx. 1/60 the weight of an elephant) can rank above an adult elephant is either through fear, learned helplessness, or in rare cases through respect based on companionship and trust. By maintaining a fear of the consequences, bullhooks and other “guides” ensure that an elephant will engage in activities it would rather not engage in (such as stand still in a line; defecate on command; stand on two legs, etc). Instruments such as bullhooks are successful in “correcting” or “guiding” an elephant only because the animals have learned to be fearful of the consequences of not following instructions. The fearfulness is based on the experience of pain being inflicted. The fear of being jabbed, however lightly, ensures that an elephant obeys commands or follows a guide, if you will. In this process, however, the independent will, choice, autonomy and purpose so important to the life of an elephant are destroyed.

In my opinion the use of bullhooks constitutes harassment of elephants. In the wild elephants may occasionally be tusked, poked or jabbed by another elephant, but these interactions are relatively infrequent and are carried out in contexts very different from those observed in circuses. In my many years of experience, elephants do not harass or continually pick on another elephant in the manner that can be observed in circuses. In addition, if an elephant is tusked or poked by another elephant she or he receives support from close associates. Elephants in the wild receive physical and vocal solidarity, thus softening any physical and psychological blows received from other elephants. In the circus elephants are not only repetitively prodded and jabbed but have no recourse, no means of escape and no ability to receive support from companions.

In my opinion, the use of bullhooks, whips or other instruments on elephants can constitute handling in a manner that could cause emotional stress and trauma. Many circus elephants exhibit stereotypical behavior – the frequent, almost mechanical, repetition of the same posture or behavior as in the rhythmical rocking, swaying or bouncing of captive elephants. This unnatural behavior of elephants, seen regularly in zoos and circuses, is never observed in the wild and is pathological. Animals subjected to prolonged experimentally induced neurosis, or those who have experienced trauma, such as beatings or continual prodding, may show extreme signs of stress and their behavior may become pathologically abnormal including great anxiety and stereotyped behavior.

In my opinion the use of a bullhook on one individual has negative consequences for other elephants. Elephants are keen social learners. In other words, much of elephant behavior is not instinctive but learned from watching or listening to others. Such learning is seen in many aspects of an elephant's daily life and is a vital component of learning. Elephants, too, are capable of empathizing with others and have even been observed to wince when a companion reaches its trunk out toward an electric wire. Consequently, when an elephant is jabbed or poked with a bullhook this action has negative psychological consequences not only for the individual elephant receiving the prod, but also for those around it. In other words, the routine use of the bullhook causes psychological harm to the elephants whether they are being hit or not.

In my opinion the use of bullhooks on elephants is inhumane. Elephants are capable of strong and complex emotions including joy, grief, compassion and empathy. Elephants are also capable of suffering from physical and emotional pain. Therefore, to treat elephants in a manner which inflicts both physical suffering and psychological suffering is inhumane.

My opinions regarding the chaining of elephants

In my opinion the chaining of elephants by circuses is physically harmful. Elephants are adapted to continuous movement over long distances. In the wild elephants are on the move 20 out of 24 hours, while in circuses the evidence from chaining suggests the reverse. Elephants in circuses are plagued by a host of physical and psychological ailments that are not observed among wild elephants. Regardless of the regular health care they receive, and despite the lack of human predation and the vagaries of drought and disease, captive elephants suffer from a host of ailments including obesity, arthritis, foot problems, reproductive and psychological disorders and die at a younger age. The pads of an elephant's foot are designed for walking long distances on uneven and rough surfaces not for standing on concrete. As a result of the predominantly stationary existence on smooth surfaces, the feet of captive elephants wear unevenly causing improper posture of the feet, and consequently of the legs and spine, and leading to painful arthritis and other joint problems. In circus elephants the joints of the extremities and also the joints of the vertebral column are affected by pathologic alterations. The uneven wear shows up regularly in captivity and the adage "use it or lose it" applies aptly to the circus elephants. Elephants need to walk to stay well.

In my opinion the chaining of elephants by circuses is behaviorally, psychologically and emotionally harmful. Some of the features that make elephants so well designed for living in large spaces, become the very reasons for the unsuitability of elephants to the circus. For example, individuals so behaviorally and emotionally well adapted to living in a close-knit society, in circuses are not allowed

the space necessary to live in natural family groups, never mind any attempt to present elephants with the option of choosing associates from among other families, clans or populations or providing the opportunity for learning survival skills through experience or from others. By chaining elephants, circuses not only severely restrict an elephant's ability to obtain adequate exercise, but they take away an enormous source of mental stimulation needed for the basic well being of such a highly social intelligent individual. As a result, the elephants are behaviorally and psychologically harmed.

The chaining and confinement of elephants in circuses deprives elephants of the opportunity to establish and foster the complex social relationships and social learning for which elephants are so well known. A life in chains does not permit elephants to search for, select from, learn about and manipulate a wide variety of food items. The normal daily activities experienced by a free-ranging elephant motivate an active mind and keep fit a vigorous body. No matter what the arena, foraging, defending, socializing, or reproducing, an elephant's daily life is distinguished by need, purpose, challenge, choice, will, autonomy and solidarity. Chaining denies an elephant these elements, so fundamental to its psychological and emotional well being. Given elephants' high level of intelligence and inquisitive nature, the confinement of elephants on chains is inhumane.

The chaining of elephants by circuses is the most likely cause of the stereotypical swaying observed in the elephants and demonstrates the harm inflicted on these animals from chaining and confinement. Such behavior is pathological and is indicative of psychological, behavioral and emotional harm.

Elephants in circuses are usually chained in loud environments with considerable low frequency generator and other machine noise. Generators produce sound at the frequencies at which elephant hearing is most sensitive and also at the frequencies at which elephant themselves communicate. The ability of elephants to detect very low frequency sounds over long distances means that in city environments, during transport in trucks and trains, and in the vicinity of circus generators, elephants are continuously exposed to low frequency machine, vehicle and air traffic noise. The elephants extreme sensitivity to these frequencies means that the loud low frequency noise that circus elephants are subjected to at various urban locations and during transport are neither humane nor healthful.

I urge your support of this important piece of legislation when it comes before your committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joyce H. Poole". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joyce" being the most prominent.

Joyce H. Poole, Ph.D.
Director
ElephantVoices