

Communication from Public

Name: Michelle Lewis

Date Submitted: 05/21/2025 02:32 PM

Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: My name is Michelle Lewis. I am supportive of many of the Budget and Finance Committee recommendations, including the restoration of over 1,000 jobs and funding for essential social and municipal services. The amended budget offers significant improvements, I hope that the Council will consider further expanding investment in climate, municipal, and social services. I understand that the city faces severe financial challenges, but the continued pattern of prioritizing police funding at the expense of other offices and programs undermines public safety far more than it helps. Neglected infrastructure, polluted neighborhoods, and extreme weather all pose severe risks to public safety. I urge you to protect the jobs, climate, and social programs that the City needs in this budget. You can deepen that investment by funding climate and social programs, protecting City workers, Day Laborer Centers, a public bank, and supporting the unarmed crisis response, UMCR, Expansion to 3 additional precincts: Mission, Rampart, and Harbor. I urge you to protect the jobs, climate and social programs that the City needs in this budget.

Communication from Public

Name: Henry Prudencio (La Comadreja jajajá)
Date Submitted: 05/21/2025 08:44 AM
Council File No: 25-0600
Comments for Public Posting: No le quiten fondos a los centros jornaleros. Soy jornalero, artista de teatro y circo. Los centros jornaleros además de ser un lugar que me han brindado trabajos también ha sido un escenario para hacer teatro y promover el arte en comunidad. Estos espacios han sido importantes en los tiempos difíciles como la pandemia del COVID 19. Los Centros jornaleros han sido el recurso más importante en mi salud mental. ¡Salven los centros jornaleros!

Communication from Public

Name: Manuela Varela

Date Submitted: 05/21/2025 01:11 PM

Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: Fund the Public Bank Feasibility Study — and Protect GBI. My name is Manuela Varela, and I'm a [LA resident / member of Council District One Five / representative of UPAS United Parents and Students Organization]. The LA City Council has already approved funding for the public bank feasibility study. I urge the Council to immediately fund the next phase. This plan will show how LA can use its own balance sheet to save money, cut borrowing costs, and reinvest in priorities like affordable housing, green energy, small businesses, and community development. At the same time, we urge the Council to preserve and expand funding for Guaranteed Basic Income programs. GBI is a proven strategy to stabilize families, reduce poverty, and lower the long-term demand on public services — ultimately saving the city money. Both the public bank and GBI are fiscally responsible solutions that move us away from costly band-aids and toward lasting change. As LA faces a \$1 billion deficit, we need bold, community-centered investments that protect our future and serve Angelenos directly.

Communication from Public

Name: Gloria Gamez

Date Submitted: 05/21/2025 01:14 PM

Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: Fund the Public Bank Feasibility Study — and Protect GBI. My name is Gloria Gamez, and I'm a [LA resident Green Meadows member of Council District 9 representative of United Parents and Students (UPAS) Organization. The LA City Council has already approved funding for the public bank feasibility study. I urge the Council to immediately fund the next phase. This plan will show how LA can use its own balance sheet to save money, cut borrowing costs, and reinvest in priorities like affordable housing, green energy, small businesses, and community development. At the same time, we urge the Council to preserve and expand funding for Guaranteed Basic Income programs. GBI is a proven strategy to stabilize families, reduce poverty, and lower the long-term demand on public services — ultimately saving the city money. Both the public bank and GBI are fiscally responsible solutions that move us away from costly band-aids and toward lasting change. As LA faces a \$1 billion deficit, we need bold, community-centered investments that protect our future and serve Angelenos directly.

Communication from Public

Name: Maria Gurubel

Date Submitted: 05/21/2025 01:17 PM

Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: Mi nombre es Maria Gurubel, y soy residente de Los Ángeles miembro del Distrito One Five del Concejo Municipal representante de la organización United Parents and Students (UPAS). El Concejo Municipal de Los Ángeles ya ha aprobado la financiación para el estudio de viabilidad del banco público. Insto al Concejo a financiar de inmediato la siguiente fase. Este plan demostrará cómo Los Ángeles puede utilizar su propio balance financiero para ahorrar dinero, reducir costos de endeudamiento y reinvertir en prioridades como vivienda asequible, energía verde, pequeñas empresas y desarrollo comunitario. Al mismo tiempo, instamos al Concejo a preservar y ampliar la financiación para los programas de Ingreso Básico Garantizado (GBI). El GBI es una estrategia comprobada para estabilizar a las familias, reducir la pobreza y disminuir la demanda a largo plazo de los servicios públicos, lo que finalmente ahorra dinero a la ciudad. Tanto el banco público como el GBI son soluciones fiscalmente responsables que nos alejan de soluciones costosas y temporales, y nos acercan a un cambio duradero. Mientras Los Ángeles enfrenta un déficit de mil millones de dólares, necesitamos inversiones audaces y centradas en la comunidad que protejan nuestro futuro y sirvan directamente a los angelinos

Communication from Public

Name:

Date Submitted: 05/21/2025 02:10 PM

Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: Eva Bitar has been such a tremendous help to the film industry. She has coordinated around and solved many obstacles that have convinced and allowed many productions to film in Los Angeles. We will be losing a great contribution to our industry without her. I have experienced first hand her care and hard work to keep filming in Los Angeles and have seen the success. It will be a great loss for us to lose her. Matt Prisk Location Manager

Communication from Public

Name: Amelia Greene

Date Submitted: 05/21/2025 05:32 PM

Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: Hi! I'm a resident of Los Angeles and I strongly oppose the proposed budget cuts to Los Angeles Animal Services. These cuts would lead to the closure of half of the city's animal services - which would create a humanitarian and public service crisis, and above all else, harm thousands of animals. Our shelters are already over capacity and severely underfunded. We need more support for LA Animal Services, not less. I URGE you to reject these cuts and work towards a long-term humane solution for our city's animals. Please do the right thing and continue to fund our shelters so they can continue to serve our communities and protect the animals that rely on them. Please please do the right thing! Thank you!

Communication from Public

Name: Claudia Oliveira

Date Submitted: 05/21/2025 08:00 PM

Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: Dear Honorable City Councilmembers, I am writing to express my strong opposition to the recommendation in the CAO's May 16, 2025, report under Council File 25-0600, which proposes the elimination of 42 Emergency Incident Technician (EIT) positions from the Los Angeles Fire Department. This proposed cut is not only shortsighted but dangerous. EITs play a critical role in incident command support and firefighter safety during emergency operations. Their presence on the fireground allows incident commanders to focus on life-saving decisions while ensuring operational accountability and communication. Without them, the burden shifts entirely to on-scene commanders, increasing risk for both responders and the public. This move would effectively dismantle a proven safety system that the LAFD has built over decades. It threatens emergency response efficiency, firefighter safety, and public trust. At a time when our city is facing more complex emergencies—from wildfires and floods to mass casualty incidents—we need more trained support, not less. The cost savings from this cut may look good on paper, but the real cost will be measured in slower response times, increased liability, and lives potentially lost. We urge you to reject this dangerous proposal and preserve the 42 EIT positions that are essential to keeping our city safe. I attached a published piece on the injuries of the Boyd Street fire explosion. These events happen often, especially in the Downtown Los Angeles Community. Without the EITs, these injuries will be future stories about fatalities. We must stand by our firefighters and the communities they serve. Sincerely, Claudia



WIDOWS, ORPHANS & DISABLED FIREFIGHTER'S FUND

The official charity of the Los Angeles Firemen's Relief Association



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Boyd Street – A Survival Story



On 05/17/ 20 at approximately 8:08 p.m. at 327 E Boyd St in downtown L.A., firefighters found smoke coming from a one-story commercial building and engaged in an aggressive fire attack. According to reports, while firefighters were attempting to extinguish the fire, a loud hissing sound could be heard coming from an area of the building. Captains on scene quickly recognized the potential danger and called for their members to exit the building. Suddenly, a significant explosion inside the structure occurred. A MAYDAY was put out over the radio and multiple firefighters still inside the structure were driven to the ground from the extreme heat. There were also firefighters on the roof making their way down via the aerial ladder on truck 9. While they did so, they were engulfed by heavy smoke and exposed to direct flame

impingement from the large explosion. 11 firefighters, both on the roof and inside the structure were burned, but luckily, all survived, however, some suffered significant injuries. The occupancy was doing business as Smoke Tokes Wholesale Distributor, reportedly a supplier for those who make butane honey oil.

A Personal Story

The surrounding story board of words is a personal account of the events as they unfolded for FF on May 16th. He was one of the 11 firefighters who were injured. These are his words as posted on social media. They have not been changed or altered.



This photo was taken on May 15th, 2020.

I was just finishing up a training session near Echo Park Lake when a random person approached me and asked if he could take my photo. I remember the weather was beautiful that day and he appeared like a professional photographer by the way he carried himself, let alone his equipment, so I agreed. The moment lasted not longer than a couple seconds. He said thank you and walked away. I had little expectation to ever see the photograph.



The following day, well, things were less beautiful. It started with me catching up with old friends sitting around the table reminiscing on May 16th, our 4 year anniversary with the LA City Fire Department. Then just after dinner, 10 other firefighters and I were investigating a fire that had just emerged in downtown LA. We had entered the narrow hallway entrance in single-file fashion. I remember the hallway being tight and ominous. There was even a ladder obstructing our entry point. We pushed further into the building when the fire roared from the end and exploded toward us, screaming with heat and fury as we hit the ground to survive.



I honestly thought this was the end. That 31 years was as far as I would reach. I remember giving up in there as the fire viciously kept on, pinning us to the floor. There was just so much heat. Heat you have never felt before. That no one has ever felt before. And though the exit was just a few paces away, the distance felt insurmountable. But then my body refused to surrender. I started panicking, crawling my way towards the sunlit doorway that I couldn't see. I was struggling to get around that ladder with my fellow firefighters. Death felt closer now.



Then I felt the sun fall onto my face. I was outside. I made it. I turned towards the exit to see how many others were still trapped. I couldn't feel the tears fall from my eyes to my cheeks, but I knew they were there as I watched the dark doorway gradually release another friend from its hold. I had never cried like that before.



We all survived that day. Though we suffered from incredible burns, we are all fortunate that we had survived. Firefighters don't survive these types of explosions. And it's these moments, these unexplainable moments that cause me to wonder if there really is something above designing each our individual storylines. I expected to die in that fire. We all did and yet here we are.

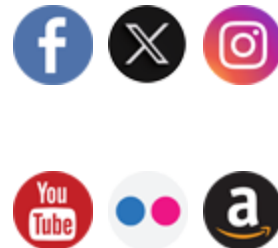


It still pains me to think about that afternoon. I was unable to draw the courage to view all the photo, video, and news coverage of the incident for a few days. The recovery ward helped. I spent a few days in there with four others that survived the blast. The comradery in surviving something like this is beyond anything I can describe with words. A lot of our moments together are in silence, yet you can feel the warmth of each other's presence.

I eventually brought myself to view all coverage. It horrified me to see everything again, reliving it all, but I couldn't keep myself from exploring more content. This path, however, led me back to this photograph. There I was - smiling, unharmed, and alive with Echo Park looking beautiful behind me. I immediately contacted the photographer and we had a heartwarming conversation. I even learned that this photograph was taken with a rare 35mm film, a type that anyone would be hard-pressed to find online or in-store. I will forever appreciate this photo. It will be printed & framed. This was almost the last photograph of me. In some ways, it is.

Life is beautiful in many ways. Live your life, not in fear of something tragic, but instead with a subtle sense of urgency. Unexpected moments can happen as I learned May 16th. Thank you to everyone for all the love & support throughout all of this. May 16th 2020 will have a unique place in my heart moving forward but I am happy to have so much family and friends supporting me.

FOLLOW



SAFETY TIPS

Communication from Public

Name: Laura Garavoglia

Date Submitted: 05/22/2025 12:05 AM

Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: The Watts Towers Art Center provides an invaluable service to the community of Watts and to the many visitors who come to experience Simon Rodia's work. It should be given the resources to continue its art and music programming and to support the tireless efforts of the staff that make it possible.

Communication from Public

Name: Lorie Cudzil

Date Submitted: 05/22/2025 12:50 AM

Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: Good Morning City Council Members. Thank you for allowing public comment to be submitted by email. My name is Lorie Cudzil, and I am the Area 6 representative for the Pacific Palisades Community Council. I sincerely appreciate all of your hard work and dedication to the City of Los Angeles. Today I write to you as a private citizen with a number of concerns. The tone of my email is one of gratitude for the countless hours all of you spend trying to make LA a great place to live and one of desperation for the situation our City is facing. When considering the budget for the upcoming year, I implore you to not allow any cuts to public safety. I experienced first hand what it is like to be in an emergency without the proper resources. My house, along with so many others burned down in the Palisades Fire on January 7, 2025. On that day and days that followed, more than half our community lost their homes, and we lost a substantial part of our town. Grocery stores, schools, places of worship, restaurants, banks, retail stores, hair and nail salons, doctors' offices, a dance studio, and so much more were all part of the destruction left behind partly due to a failed infrastructure. People have had to relocate not knowing if they can/will ever return. Seniors who were retired and hoped to grow old in their homes are facing severe uncertainty. Teens who suffered as middle schoolers during Covid were forced to return to zoom learning for over three months. Business owners and their employees lost thousands of dollars in wages. Cuts to anything having to do with public safety have the potential to cause damage that will last years and even change the trajectory of people's lives. We cannot let what happened in the Palisades or Altadena happen to another part of Los Angeles ever again. Some of the questions that haunt so many of us are: Why wasn't there any water in the reservoir? Why weren't ALL the fire hydrants working? Why wasn't there a police officer at Palisades Drive directing traffic as soon as the fire was reported? The answers all seem to go back to budget cuts. If we had proper systems in place, the unimaginable level of destruction that took place could have and would have been averted. Measures that are in place for saving lives and property should not be taken away. Safety NEEDS to be the priority. As you finalize the scope of the budget cuts, may I respectfully suggest cutting certain salaries? I believe a good start would be

cutting the salary of the CEO of the LADWP. Thank you for your time and consideration. It is greatly appreciated.

Communication from Public

Name: Brian Risley

Date Submitted: 05/22/2025 02:06 AM

Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: Dear Los Angeles City Councilmembers, As Manager of APLA Health's HIV & Older Adults Programs that serves over 500 older men and women with HIV, many who are persons of color living at or below federal poverty levels, I urge you not to cut or terminate funding to the LA City AIDS Coordinator's Office that supports vital programs like ours. Loss of funding would adversely impact the health and well-being of our hundreds of clients, as we would lose the ability to keep our seniors engaged and retained in healthcare and to address their more complex psycho-social needs. The isolation and loneliness that many of our older adults with HIV have been able to escape through our social engagement activities, life skills programming and health and wellness education would return if we lose city funding to sustain these services. In 2018, APLA Health launched HIVE (HIV-Elders), tailored for men and women of all ethnicities who are 50 years of age and older and living with HIV and it is recognized as a pioneering program nationally. HIVE is designed to improve the health and well-being of this growing population of men and women (over 57% in Los Angeles) by addressing stigma, social isolation, social support, connection, empowerment and ongoing referrals to our direct essential services. Since 1983, APLA Health has remained steadfast in its commitment to ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic in our lifetime. The agency, a multi-site operation, includes seven Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) locations serving more than 18,000 people annually in Los Angeles County, the nation's most populous. We provide 20 different services including: medical, dental, and behavioral healthcare; HIV specialty care; Sexual Health Services & Community Resources. For people living with HIV, we offer housing support services through the Alliance for Housing & Healing; benefits counseling; home healthcare; and the Vance North Necessities of Life Program food pantry program. Our dedicated team in the HIV & Older Adults Programs will be disbanded with loss of city funding, since many of our programs, unlike our clinics, rely on grant funding for sustainability. That would mean a loss of service to 500+ men and women with HIV who rely on us daily to help them manage their chronic HIV disease and co-morbidities like depression, anxiety, heart disease, diabetes and frailty. For more information, please visit

www.aplahealth.org Please remember us and our older adults when casting your votes! We thank you for your just and responsible decisions. With warm regards, Brian Risley Manager, HIV & Older Adults Programs APLA Health

Communication from Public

Name:

Date Submitted: 05/22/2025 04:51 AM

Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: Hello my name is: Jonathan , I am supportive of many of the Budget and Finance Committee recommendations, including the restoration of over 1,000 jobs and funding for essential social and municipal services. The amended budget offers significant improvements, I hope that the Council will consider further expanding investment in climate, municipal, and social services. The continued pattern of prioritizing police funding at the expense of other offices and programs undermines public safety far more than it helps. I urge you to protect the jobs, climate and social programs that the City needs in this budget. You can deepen that investment by funding climate and social programs, public infrastructure, unarmed crisis response, and a public bank.

Communication from Public

Name: Lynne Chao

Date Submitted: 05/22/2025 05:03 AM

Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: RE: Audit Zoo Department See my testimony attached.

Dear Honorable Council Members,

“Los Angeles Zoo currently stands as one of the most divisive institutions in the city, raising questions...” says LA Times.¹ In Defense of Animals IDS ranked LA Zoo the “worst zoo in North America for elephants in 2023 due to its treatment of Billy the elephant.”²

The key person consistently in charge for the last 25 years is Zoo Director Denise Verret, who served as deputy director, interim director, director & CEO commencing in the year 2000. Abuse of Billy has been ongoing for 36 years since his arrival in 1989. For 25 years, Director Denise Verret has been in charge.

CALL TO ACTION:

- Transparency in the Zoo Department.
- Hire an independent counsel for performance, facilities, and financial audit since general fund is involved.
- Demand for the resignation of Zoo Director Denise Verret until she agrees to a department audit and shows total transparency during her terms as Deputy Director, Interim Director, Chief Executive Officer and Director from 2000 to present.
- Hold Zoo Director Denise Verret accountable for compliance failures to AZA Standards for Elephant Welfare and Care which have been non-compliant for her entire 25-year term. Since Director Denise Verret is an AZA accreditation inspector, why is LA Zoo, under her executive powers, not held accountable to AZA standards for the protection of animals in her care?
- I ask the Council of Oversight Committee to please look holistically from Director Verret’s role in **GLAZA** to abuse and neglect of Billy and the elephants (even if elephants are no longer at the zoo) to the current welfare of the animals now in her care. (AZA non-compliance does not need elephants to be present.)

The key argument was not zoo vs. sanctuary or which is better.

The key argument is where the safest place for Billy having been abused in the hands of AZA initiated policy and AZA LA Zoo. AZA Tulsa Zoo was clearly the wrong choice.

Billy was sexually abused in the interest of the Species Survival Program for Asian Elephants. Billy was subjected

¹ LA Magazine 2/2/24: Elephant Deaths at L.A. Zoo Renew Calls for Gentle Giants to Be Moved to Larger Sanctuaries. By Julius Miller <https://lamag.com/news/elephants-deaths-los-angeles-zoo-captivity-sanctuary>

² The Sun San Fernando Valley 1/17/24: LA Zoo Takes Top Spot in List of Worst Zoos in North America for Elephants in 2023. By Gabriel Arizon <https://sanfernandosun.com/2024/01/17/la-zoo-takes-top-spot-in-list-of-worst-zoos-in-north-america-for-elephants-in-2023/>

to artificial invasive semen collection process,^{3 11} an AZA initiative written into AZA Elephant Standard of Welfare and Care policy that elephants must submit to.^{5 6}

Sexual abuse could continue at the Tulsa Zoo in the guise of species survival. An abused animal is easy to submit especially one who the LA Zoo coerced with bull whip and sent to Have Trunks Will Travel, a notorious training camp to coerce elephants into submission with bull whips.

Director Verret clearly states on May 8th Budget Committee Hearing that the best place for Billy and Tina and for the Species Survival Program for Asian Elephants is the Tulsa Zoo.

*"Forcing captive and wild male elephants into involuntary sperm extraction...then coercively inseminating female elephants without their choice of partner, **is rape**. These violations, hidden behind the guise of conservation, are a trespass on personal autonomy and remove all choice and control over an individual's outcomes or mates."*

— Les O'Brien, Elephant Consultant and former Zoo Elephant Keeper⁴

See AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care code 3.2.8. (Adopted 2001). ⁵

"All elephants must be trained to accept regular collection of...semen..."

See AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care code 3.3.2.6. (Adopted 2011) ⁶ "Elephant Restraint Devices (ERD) **Standard:** All elephant facilities should have an ERD. If a facility does not have an ERD, staff must demonstrate a method of restraint that allows...reproductive procedures..."

Reasons for the audit (Verret's lack of transparency and cooperation):

In the May 5th 2025-26 Budget Committee Hearing,⁷ Director Verret's lack of transparency further questions her leadership and her unilateral style of command.

- Verret's complete lack of transparency regarding Billy and Tina, the elephants, in the Budget Committee Hearing. ⁷
- Verret's refusal to answer questions in the Budget Committee Hearing regarding if contract was signed with Tulsa Zoo to transport Billy and Tina. ⁷
- Verret's refusal to submit \$80,000 transport fee to the Budget Committee, the committee of oversight when committee has requested twice in a motion and budget memo. ⁷

³ Free To Be Elephants Billy | 40 years old | Los Angeles Zoo <https://freetobeelephants.com/elephant/billy-2/>

⁴ In Defense of Animals 1/26/24: Elephants Assaulted in the Wild to Increase Zoo Populations. Posted Courtney Scott
<https://www.idausa.org/campaign/elephants/latest-news/zoos-stealing-wild-elephant-sperm/>

⁵ AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care (Adopted 2001, Updated 2003)
<https://www.elephants.com/pdf/AZA%20Elephant%20Standards%201.pdf>

⁶ AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care Adopted (Approved March 2011, Revised April 2012)
https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2332/aza_standards_for_elephant_management_and_care.pdf

⁷ 5/5 FY 2025-26 Budget Hearing https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0tFe_1RqCA Start at 2:34 End at 3:00

Verret's refusal to bring revised transportation cost of \$44,000 (other half paid by Tulsa Zoo) to Budget Committee for review bypassing the process. May 8th.⁸

Verret unilaterally decides (without Budget committee input) that taxpayers will pay \$44,000 transport cost during a budget shortfall when committee is asking each department for offsets to keep jobs.⁸

- Verret's refusal to consider sanctuary options (AZA accredited or otherwise) for Billy and Tina at \$0 cost to taxpayers (paid by Last Chance for Animals)⁸ even when sanctuary offers 3,000 acres for elephants vs. 17 miles at Tulsa Zoo.
- Under Verret's executive leadership, the zoo transported Billy and Tina in the middle of the night, in secrecy on Monday, May 19th.
- Verret ignored public outcry to send Billy and Tina to sanctuary without allowing public input.
- Under Verret's executive leadership, the zoo lied to the public on May 20th saying Billy and Tina were still at the LA Zoo but in fact they were in transit to Tulsa Zoo.

Reasons for the audit (abuse and neglect of elephants):

During the May 5th FY 2025-26 Proposed Budget Hearing,⁷ Denise Verret refused to send Billy and Tina to sanctuary and avoided questions repeatedly, replying, **"I am going to continue to make decisions that are in the best interest for the animals at the zoo and that includes the elephants."**⁷

She did not make decisions in best interest of Billy past or present.

- **Was it in the best interest** for Billy to be forced into invasive procedures by LA Zoo and AZA to artificially collect semen from 2011-2014.¹⁰ He was a virgin. **A human inserts his arm into the elephant's anus to manually stimulate ejaculation⁹¹¹ essentially ANAL RAPING the elephant while elephant is strapped to a device immobile and conscious.** Billy underwent what the zoo termed "training" (code 3.2.8.)⁵ for the semen collection process at least 55 times from June 20, 2011, to November 14, 2014.¹⁰ **He was completely isolated as the only elephant at the zoo for 21 years (1989-2010).** With 3 females added: two in 2010 and one in 2017, he was continuously isolated in his 1-acre encampment separated from the herd. He was anally raped by his caretakers and isolated in his 1-acre encampment with limited elephant socialization for comfort or companionship. **Verret was deputy director.**
- **Is it in the best interest** of Billy and Tina to go to AZA Tulsa Zoo with 1.57 acres per elephant enclosure? Billy already exhibits zoochotic mental behavior from his 1-acre enclosure.

⁸ 5/8 FY 2025-26 Budget Hearing <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzPUQ80IIWc> 11:20:20 to 11:39:12

⁹ Free To Be Elephants | Billy | 40 years old | Los Angeles Zoo <https://freetobeelephants.com/elephant/billy-2/>

¹⁰ In Defense of Animals 12/16/16: Los Angeles Zoo: Release Billy to Sanctuary!
Caroline Saxon <https://www.idausa.org/los-angeles-zoo-release-billy-sanctuary/>

- **Was it in the best interest** for Billy to be in solitude confinement his entire 36 years at L.A. Zoo? He spent his first 21 years as the only elephant in the zoo. Then another 12 years were spent isolated from female herd in his separate 1-acre enclosure in solitude confinement.
- **Was it in the best interest** for Billy in 2012 when he had the opportunity to go to a 2,300-acre elephant sanctuary in Northern California (due to public outcry about his zoochosis) and LA Zoo denied him.¹¹
- **Was it in the best interest** of the elephants to have a \$42 million expansion of “Elephants of Asia” exhibit to spend taxpayers money focused mainly on increasing tourist foot traffic areas. Priority was not given to significantly improve the outdoor habitation and welfare of the elephants. Instead, four elephants were given 3.6 acres which is 1-acre per elephant encampment.**Error! Bookmark not defined.** The elephants became an object of revenue. Billy’s zoochosis and mental state prior to expansion in 2010 was not a priority or concern. **Verret was Deputy Director.**

Reasons for the audit (AZA non-compliance)

Verret is on the Board of Directors for Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) as an **accreditation inspector** yet under her executive leadership, **LA Zoo is not abiding by AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care.** (Adopted March 21, 2001, Updated May 5, 2003)⁵ and updated (Approved March 2011, Revised April 2012).⁶

- Non-compliant: First 21 years (1989 to 2010), Billy was the only elephant at zoo void of any elephant contact, companionship or socialization till Tina and Jewel arrived 2010. **Ten years, Verret was deputy director (2000 to 2010).**

AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care (Adopted 3/21/01, Updated 3/5/03)^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}

- **Group Compositions**

2.2.4.^{Error! Bookmark not defined.} Institutions must provide an opportunity for each elephant to exercise and interact socially with other elephants (Taylor and Poole 1998, EMA 1999).

With the 2010 arrival of Tina and Jewel, Billy continued to be isolated in his 1-acre encampment, meeting minimal space requirements.

- Non-compliant for 1-year 2010 – 2011. AZA Policy revised March 2011. Female group size was not maintained. Three required. 2010-2017 only two females, Tina and Jewel.

AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care (Adopted 3/21/01, Updated 3/5/03)^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}

- **Group Size**

2.3.1.^{Error! Bookmark not defined.} Zoos should make every effort to maintain elephants in social groupings. It is inappropriate to keep highly social female elephants singly (see Sukumar 1992, Taylor and Poole 1998, EMA 1999). Institutions should strive to hold no less than three elephants whenever possible.

¹¹ Los Angeles Magazine 11/25/14: The Ongoing Saga of Billy the Elephant by Tamar Brott

<https://lamag.com/news/new-wrinkle>

- Non-compliant for 16 months (Jan 3, 2024, to May 2025) with euthanasia of Shaunzi (Jan. 3, 2024). Only two elephants remain Billy and Tina. Three elephants are required for mixed gender.

AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care (Adopted 3/21/01, Updated 3/5/03)⁶

- **Group Composition**

2.2.1.1. Error! Bookmark not defined. Suggested age and sex structure of social group

Standard: Each zoo holding elephants must hold a minimum of three females (or the space to hold three females), two males or three elephants of mixed gender.⁵

- Non-compliant 8 months. 2023, Billy: Medical records show “his feet left untreated for eight months while...in musth...”¹²

AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care (Approved March 2011, Revised April 2012) Error! Bookmark not defined.

- **Medical Management**

3.3.2.2. Error! Bookmark not defined. **Foot Care**

Standard: The elephants should be free of foot injuries or foot disease...If foot injuries or foot disease are present, a current treatment regimen must be in place.

- Non-compliant for 14 years (AZA approved March 2011 to 2025) Error! Bookmark not defined.
Zoo denied Billy more space than his 1-acre encampment even though Billy exhibits extreme stress (videoed as early as 2007) with zoochotic behavior (standing in place, rocking, swaying repetitively, signs of immense stress and brain damage).

AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care (Approved March 2011, Revised April 2012) Error! Bookmark not defined.

- **1.4.1.2.** Error! Bookmark not defined. **Outdoor space**

Standard: Outdoor habitats must provide sufficient space and environmental complexity to both allow for and stimulate natural behavioral activities and social interactions resulting in healthy and well-adapted elephants.

- **Measurement:** If there are elephant behavioral, social, or medical issues shown to be caused by insufficient space, there must be a program in place (from a programmatic and/or facility perspective) to address the issue

Watch [Free Billy \(full video\)](#) the Shocking Neglect of an LA Zoo Elephant.¹³

LA Times Magazine: [The Ongoing Saga of Billy the Elephant](#)¹¹ about the history of LA Zoo (please read).

There are 1,700 animals at the LA Zoo. Please help.

Thank you, Council Members.

¹² In Defense of Animals: End Elephants Billy & Tina’s Torment at The Los Angeles Zoo, Send Them to Sanctuary, Not Another Zoo!

<https://www.idausa.org/campaign/elephants/latest-news/free-la-zoo-elephants-billy-tina/#:~:text=Billy's%20Story,on%20his%201%2Dacre%20yard>

¹³ Free Billy the Shocking Neglect of an LA Zoo Elephant (2021)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5nNKzSDcYo>

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The Ongoing Saga of Billy the Elephant

The years-long battle over Billy, the Los Angeles Zoo's best-known pachyderm, didn't end when he moved into a new \$42 million enclosure. He's part of a plan to save the very survival of a species—not wild elephants but the ones that live in zoos

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In the spring of 2010, a veterinarian named Dr. Thomas Hildebrandt flew over the savannahs of Africa, shooting male elephants with tranquilizer darts and—with the aid of something called an Acujack—masturbating them while they were unconscious so he could collect their sperm and cryogenically freeze it. Hildebrandt planned to inject it into the female zoo elephants of Europe and North America, which are not reproducing quickly enough to sustain the zoo population. One of the reasons they are not doing so is that male zoo elephants suffer from low libido and poor-quality sperm. Hildebrandt saw the project as a much-needed workaround. It was funded by zoos on both continents and dubbed “Operation Frozen Dumbo.”

The operation was the latest in a series of efforts by the zoo industry to address the dwindling number of zoo elephants, which has reached such a low mark that in 2005, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (the North American zoo industry’s trade group) issued an advisory stating that if something wasn’t done, there would soon be nothing left to display. At present there are only 168 African and 138 Asian elephants in North America. Less than half of those are thought to be still capable of procreation, and of those that are, the majority are precariously close to being inbred. Nearly one-third of the Asian population, for instance, was sired by two elephants named Charlie and Vance.

The zoo elephant shortage is partially the result of the passage of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, which made it nearly impossible to import animals facing extinction. Prior to that, all one had to do was fly to where elephants live, shoot a mother, and capture its baby, so little thought had gone into the challenges of breeding them in captivity, which have proved to be extensive. In the beginning the issues seemed mostly logistical. Since elephants weigh an average of four tons and may be separated by thousands of miles, coupling them sometimes demanded the use of military transport planes. Over time, though, it became



apparent that the real issue was infertility, which for reasons no one understands, afflicts both males and females.



The zoo receives 1.5 million visitors a year. Photographs by Maarten De Boer

Hildebrandt, who was born in East Germany and is 51 years old, heads the Department of Reproduction Management at the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research in Berlin. He's been attempting to address the procreative problems of near-extinct animals in captivity his entire career. In 1998, Hildebrandt pioneered the method now used to artificially inseminate elephants, but his efforts were stymied by his inability to freeze sperm in such a way that would keep it viable when defrosted. Consequently he was forced to rely on the chilled sperm of bulls living within an eight-hour radius of an ovulating female, which is how long sperm can live outside the body if kept in a solution made from quail or hen egg yolk.

Hildebrandt's difficulties stemmed from ice crystals, which would puncture the sperm cell membranes and destroy them. But in 2009, researchers devised a way to bypass this obstacle, using a method called "directional freezing" that in essence points the sharp ends of the ice crystals away from the cell.

Thus began Operation Frozen Dumbo, which if it succeeded could provide an unlimited supply of elephant sperm and ensure a fresh gene pool. But the outcome would not be known for 22 months, the gestation period for an elephant. In the meantime the AZA continued to pursue other avenues. It had already asked its 156-member zoos to begin collecting sperm from all elephants over the age of six that were not yet represented in the gene pool, which wasn't many. Of the North American Asian elephant population, there were three, to be exact. One lived in Mexico City. The second lived in Albuquerque. The third was a 12-pound virgin in Los Angeles named Billy.

At the time Billy was the Los Angeles Zoo's only elephant, and he did not seem a likely candidate to repopulate anything. He was 24 years old and had spent nearly all of his life in a pen the size of a small bowling alley, where he was often seen rocking back and forth the way some autistic people do and occasionally dry-humping an old tire. He was also the subject of one of the most bitter and longest-running lawsuits in the history of the zoo industry, one that began in 2007 and continues to this day.

The dispute initially appeared to be about the significance of Billy's rocking motion. A group of concerned citizens saw it as an indication that he was not flourishing at the zoo or was possibly going insane, and they petitioned the city, which owns the zoo and all the animals in it, to send Billy to a 2,300-acre elephant sanctuary in Northern California. The zoo did not want him to go, however. Plans were already under way to build him a new enclosure called the Pachyderm Forest. So the zoo mounted a countercampaign to assure the city that Billy's head bobbing was not a sign of distress but a sign of anticipatory pleasure at the thought of seeing his trainers. "It's kind of like when I come home and my dog is jumping up and down on the patio," the zoo's director, John Lewis, told me. He also said that a small enclosure was no impediment to a healthy lifestyle, noting that Billy's keepers had him do wind sprints by throwing carrots from one end of his enclosure to the other.

Billy had become a cause célèbre long before Hildebrandt reached Africa. Since 2003, famous people had been campaigning for his release, chief among them the renowned elephant behaviorist Joyce Poole, who is considered the Jane Goodall of pachyderms. In an open letter she stated that elephants don't rock back and forth in the wild, that it was a coping mechanism for Billy's "loneliness, boredom and frustration." Halle Berry, Cher, and Bill Maher led their own crusades; Lily Tomlin called the zoo "elephant-speak for Guantanamo"; and people were picketing and posting videos on YouTube. One of them featured a song that went "Billy, his name is Billy. / He's confined in a zoo with nothing to do / But bob and sway through every troubled day..."

To read the news accounts is to see how the topic of Billy's well-being became overshadowed by other topics, such as whether a city with no elephant is a city with no self-esteem and whether the people who want Billy sent to the sanctuary are elitists trying to deny the rest of us access to the wild kingdom. When councilman Dennis Zine said he'd seen elephants in Africa and that they don't belong in zoos, councilman Tom LaBonge, in whose district the zoo resides, proclaimed that not everyone can afford to go to Africa but that we can all take the freeway to the zoo. The notion that the public is entitled to see elephants during business hours has been championed by the zoo's supporters, most notably actress Betty White, who declared that the campaign to free Billy was only the opening salvo in a far larger battle. "It will not stop with elephants," she wrote in the zoo's quarterly magazine. "Giraffes will be next. If they win this battle, they will not stop until zoos themselves are extinct."

As farcical as it seemed, the bickering over Billy really was about things more critical than they appeared. In essence it was about what should be done with the last remaining members of a near-extinct species. And whether the zoo industry's commitment to breeding them in captivity has taken the law of supply and demand to its utmost extreme by, in a sense, monetizing extinction itself.

John Lewis, who has been the Los Angeles Zoo's director since 2003, has white hair and a mustache that recalls men who run ice cream parlors in Norman Rockwell paintings. Prior to his arrival in Los Angeles, he led the John Ball Zoo in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for 17 years. He also served as president of the AZA and is a former member of its accreditation committee. At 62 years old Lewis comes across as a cordial man of science. He makes a point never to anthropomorphize the animals in public. In fact, he doesn't know the human names bestowed on most of the animals and doesn't care to. "I know people like to say, 'This is Bob the Monkey,' " he said. "But I find it diminishes them. I prefer to focus on the uniqueness of their digestive systems and whether they eat leaves and ferment them in their stomachs."

Lewis presides over 1,200 animals that live in more or less three concentric circles. In the outer circle are the smaller apes and the hoof stock. In the second circle are the blue-chip animals most people come to the zoo to see: lions, tigers, bears, and apes. Elephants have always lived in the inner circle. Since the zoo is a botanical garden as well, Lewis also presides over the foliage between the cages, which is extraordinarily beautiful, especially in the late afternoon. There are fig trees, palms, honeysuckle, rosebushes, and cycads along with the insects and birds that dwell among them. Approximately 1.5 million people visit the zoo each year, and not all of them come with children. Many adults regard it as a place to commune with nature. I once heard a lady in the aviary cry out that it was like the Garden of Eden, and I've seen more than one woman stare deep into the eyes of a monkey and ask, "What are you thinking?"

Given the size of L.A., our zoo is surprisingly modest. It never makes the list of the country's top ten zoos and is outclassed by those that do. Omaha's zoo has America's largest indoor rain forest and desert. The zoo in Columbus, Ohio, has an adjoining 18-hole golf course and a water park. Closer to home, the Los Angeles Zoo has always lived in the shadow of the San Diego Zoo, whose collection of blue-chip animals is larger by an order of magnitude and includes pandas—something L.A. will probably never have, because the Chinese government rents them out for \$1 million a year and there aren't enough to go around.

The L.A. Zoo was built in 1966, and much of it seems trapped in the past. A good many of the animals still live in tiny enclosures and grottoes, and the people who are upset about Billy tend to be just as upset about the jaguar, whose cage is roughly the size of a food truck. "In a city so wealthy and so preoccupied with storytelling and the creation of illusion, you would expect something spectacular, almost breathtaking," Australian zoo designer David Hancocks told me. "But the Los Angeles Zoo is strangely disappointing."

Lewis was hired by mayor James Hahn in the hope that he would finally make the zoo world-class. He had the capital to do so. In 1998, bond monies were approved for the zoo to build ten new attractions costing \$172 million. Eight have been completed during Lewis's tenure, among them Sea Life Cliffs, Campo Gorilla Reserve, a reptile facility, and Rainforest of the Americas. But Lewis will most likely be remembered for the Pachyderm Forest, where he said he planned to breed elephants in order to save them from extinction.

The L.A. Zoo's jaguar, whose enclosure has stirred criticism for being too small. Photographs by Maarten De Boer.



The dispute over Billy was not the first of its kind. During the past ten years, campaigns have been waged against zoos around the country, and a handful have been effective. Zoos in Detroit, Toronto, Anchorage, San Francisco, and San Jose have sent their elephants to sanctuaries, and the Bronx Zoo has pledged to close its exhibit when the last of its elephants expire. The person behind many of those efforts is a woman in her fifties named Catherine Doyle, who has long brown hair and a nose stud and lives in Hollywood with her husband and son. She has been plaguing Lewis since 2004, when she first began putting the Los Angeles Zoo on her annual list of the worst zoos for elephants.

Doyle currently serves as director of science, research, and advocacy at Performing Animal Welfare Society, the sanctuary in the Northern California town of San Andreas. But in 2004, she was the elephant campaign director of the animal advocacy group In Defense of Animals, which involved flying around the country and trying to persuade zoos to send the elephants to PAWS or to the nation's only other sanctuary, located in Hohenwald, Tennessee. Sometimes Doyle would even provide funding for the animals' transportation, much of it donated by Bob Barker, the former host of *The Price Is Right*. Over the years Barker has spent several million dollars airlifting zoo elephants to sanctuaries and paying for their housing.

Back then Doyle usually dressed in a man's black suit jacket with black leggings, unless she was traveling in the Midwest, in which case she'd remove the nose stud and put on a skirt and heels. "I don't want to look marginal," she said.

She would often begin her presentations by noting that elephants are known to be highly intelligent and self-aware, meaning they can recognize themselves in the mirror, a trait thought to be shared by few animals. After that she might explain how they live in large herds led by matriarchs and that males leave the herd once they reach sexual maturity but that females remain together for life, helping one another through childbirth, rearing one another's offspring, and mourning one another's dead. Keeping such animals and breeding them in captivity, where many lead solitary lives, is both cruel and detrimental to their health, she'd say.

One set of statistics she's frequently cited is that the natural life span of elephants in the wild is 70 years; Africans average 33 years and Asians 44 in zoos, where they suffer from diseases such as herpes, tuberculosis, obesity, and arthritis, not to mention mental problems. "Billy's not the only elephant who rocks back and forth," Doyle told me. "You see the same stereotypical behavior all across the country. I've even heard of elephants self-mutilating. It gets so bad sometimes, they have to be put on Thorazine."

When Doyle first started, she was admittedly naive. She wore an elephant suit to a rally in El Paso and nearly collapsed from heat prostration. But in the years since, she'd come to understand that it is no easy thing to persuade people to give up their elephants. They tend to be associated with the happier aspects of childhood—Babar and Dumbo and the notion of the gentle giant—and some people can become irrational at the thought of their elephants being taken away, even in the face of scientific evidence indicating they'd be better off elsewhere. Doyle learned, whenever possible, to focus on the fiscal irresponsibility of maintaining elephants. It costs an average of \$100,000 a year just to keep one alive at a zoo. They eat 250 pounds of fresh produce a day, for example. They can also be lethal. So many keepers—16—have been killed by elephants during the past 24 years that the AZA now requires its member zoos to install elephant restraint devices, which are steel cages the size of a 7-Eleven, with adjustable walls, a series of small portholes, and hydraulic gates that allow zoo staff to examine the elephant without fear of reprisal. Doyle hoped that once people heard these things, they would conclude that the money might be better spent on, say, expanding the city's police force.

This strategy seemed especially apt in the case of Billy. His new enclosure, which would eventually cost \$12 million, was to be constructed during a period when L.A. was cutting city services in order to avoid

bankruptcy in the future. Doyle argued that it would be economical and humane to send Billy to PAWs, the only North American sanctuary with the capacity to contain male elephants. Barker, Tomlin, and Cher had pledged \$1.5 million between them to cover Billy's costs, and according to Doyle, a barn had already been reserved for him. It was set in the middle of the sanctuary, on a three-acre hillock that has a view of the Sierra, with other elephants nearby. There was Maggie from Anchorage, Lulu from San Francisco, Mara from San Jose, Wanda from Detroit, and Nicholas, who used to ride a bicycle in the circus. From the barn you could see their silhouettes tearing down branches and napping in the grass. But you would never be able to see them having sex, because the sanctuary finds the idea of raising more elephants in captivity to be repugnant. "The day they bring in a breeding female for Billy," Ed Stewart, who runs the sanctuary, told me, "is the day I lie down in front of a truck."

One of the sad facts of life is the ever-growing list of things we used to regard as wholesome that are now widely thought to be vaguely sinister, like priests or doughnuts or zoos. That zoos have come to be on this list is partly due to activists like Doyle and partly due to the proliferation of nature documentaries that serve only to reinforce their claims that zoo animals are torpid and sad and not living as they should. The frequency of bizarre zoo tragedies involving negligence has not helped matters. In the past eight years alone a zookeeper in Tucson inadvertently killed a giraffe by feeding it a poisonous plant, a goat at the Calgary Zoo accidentally strangled itself to death in front of small children while playing with a rope toy, and a hippopotamus in Topeka was parboiled in its own wading pool as a result of a boiler malfunction.

It is only natural that the AZA, whose member zoos generate an estimated \$2 billion a year, has a crisis management team dedicated to neutralizing the effect of such mishaps and the detractors who cite them. One way it does so is by downplaying the notion that zoos constitute an industry at all. The AZA portrays itself as the "world's preeminent wildlife conservation association" whose mission is not to entertain so much as to educate the public about the mysteries of the animal kingdom, a rapidly growing portion of which faces extinction. To visit a zoo these days is to see merry-go-rounds that have been transformed into "endangered species carousels" and signs posted outside the animals' cages noting how many are left on earth and soliciting donations on their behalf. The AZA claims that these efforts, along with its breeding programs, are so important, the animal kingdom's very survival depends on zoos. "We're not like the steel industry," an AZA spokesman told me. "We're a hedge against extinction."

This is a line of thinking Lewis adheres to. He argues that if Billy were hidden away near the Sierra, where no one could see him, the public would have no way of knowing about the plight of wild elephants. They are being killed by poachers at an estimated rate of one every 15 minutes, and the forests and savannahs where they used to live are being turned into farmland. Because there is nowhere left to hide or forage, they devour the crops and are frequently killed by farmers, who regard them less as a dwindling species and more as a terrifying breed of giant locust. "By keeping them in zoos and getting people excited about them and spending money while they're here, we can send money to Cambodia to support what's going on with

elephants in the wild,” Lewis said. “We have been donating close to \$30,000 a year to Flora & Fauna International. They’re teaching farmers how to protect their crops from elephants.”

Billy in his two-acre portion of the Elephants of Asia exhibit. Photographs by Maarten De Boer.

The idea that elephants must remain in zoos so they can serve as ambassadors and fund-raisers for their brethren in the wild became a dominant theme in the debate over Billy. Doyle had come up against this argument in previous campaigns, because it is one of the primary talking points of the AZA, which has framed its desire to breed elephants as a moral imperative.

And many of the zoo’s supporters believe that it is. Karen Winnick, who is president of the Zoo Commission (the five-member oversight panel appointed by the mayor), told the L.A. city council that the survival of elephants depended on the donations of zoo-goers. “Once we no longer exhibit an animal, we can no longer support conservation efforts in the wild,” she said.

It was partly on the basis of this argument that the city council approved construction of the Pachyderm Forest and later its expansion to six manicured acres. However, the true scope of Lewis’s ambitions could only be seen in the renderings of the elephant barn: The building had 11 stalls, which the zoo evidently hoped Billy would populate himself, giving it one of the largest zoo-elephant populations in North America. A call had already gone out to find him a mate, and staff had begun training him to stand on his hind legs so he would know what to do when she arrived. What’s more, Billy was being prepped for sperm collection, which is generally accomplished by inserting one’s arm into the elephant’s anus and massaging his prostate until he ejaculates. If that doesn’t work, a rubber elephant vagina can be used, but these can be cumbersome.



Construction on the Pachyderm Forest began in 2006. The following year the late actor Robert Culp and a Brentwood real estate agent named Aaron Leider sued the City of Los Angeles and John Lewis to halt construction, arguing that even if it were significantly larger than Billy's existing pen and made to look like paradise, the Pachyderm Forest's six acres would never be adequate for a bull elephant. "It's like raising a human child in a regular-size closet, then you move him to a walk-in closet and hail it as some kind of a wonderful change," said Culp and Leider's attorney, David Casselman.

A 61-year-old with white, receding hair and a rapid-fire way of speaking, Casselman works in Tarzana but frequently flies to Cambodia, where he's established his own elephant sanctuary. It was clear from the start that Casselman hoped to use the lawsuit to expose what he considered the mendacity of the zoo industry, of which there was no clearer evidence in his mind than the \$42 million price tag of the Pachyderm Forest. "Do you have any idea what that amount of money could do for the elephants of Cambodia?" he said to me. "I personally bought a million acres there for a quarter of a million dollars. They could have bought a hundred square miles of land that would have protected them in perpetuity." As for the \$30,000 the zoo donates each year to Cambodia, he scoffed. "The AZA has done nothing to help the elephants of Cambodia that I'm aware of. It's all just a grandiose scheme to imprison animals and use them to raise money in the name of conservation."

Casselmann filed suit under an obscure taxpayer statute that allows citizens to sue their government if it has engaged in waste or fraud. By reframing Billy as a piece of city property and using the industry's own elephant mortality rates against it, he could argue that if Billy were placed in the Pachyderm Forest, he would perish prematurely, thereby wasting taxpayer money. The city tried to have the lawsuit dismissed, but the court agreed to hear it, which Casselman regarded as a fortuitous sign, if not a victory unto itself. No one had used this legal strategy before, and the interest it generated in the animal rights community was immense. "I'm getting calls from all over the country," Casselman told me when I met him. "People are watching."

Despite the lawsuit, the Pachyderm Forest opened in December 2010. The exhibit, which had been renamed Elephants of Asia, had a giant red-and-orange Thai-themed barn, two ponds, a waterfall, a mud wallow, and additional features not visible to visitors. The rock formation behind the waterfall was actually a hollow booth with little windows for the staff to fill with vegetables, and the depth of the smaller pond was adjustable so that, in the event a baby were born, it could splash around without drowning.

The zoo had even managed to procure a pair of females. However, the shortage is so profound, the only ones available were two circus refugees named Tina and Jewel, both of whom were past childbearing age and suffered from gum disease. They wouldn't be able to share Billy's space, either; the zoo feared that in his near-constant state of sexual arousal, he might inadvertently kill them. And so he and the pair were cordoned off from one another by a series of fences and hydraulic gates through which Billy could touch them only with his trunk.

Lewis and I went to see Elephants of Asia one morning not long after it opened. The trial was still ahead, but he was confident the zoo would prevail. "I know they're wrong," he said of his opponents. It galled Lewis how they claimed that elephants live an average of 70 years in the wild and only 40 in zoos. "The reality is, elephants in the wild and zoos live an average of 40 years," he said. Lewis's statement is based on the position of the AZA, which allows that elephants do live to 70 in an ideal world, but since the world is not ideal, one must factor in the 35,000 elephants reportedly killed by poachers each year, which lowers the



combined life expectancy to about 40. “You and I can live to 115, but probably we’re going to live until about 80,” he said. “And they weren’t explaining that context.”

The Chimpanzees of Mahale Mountains exhibit opened in 1998, replacing a concrete enclosure. Photographs by Maarten De Boer.

Because Lewis does not give interviews alone, we were accompanied by the zoo’s then-marketing director, Jason Jacobs, who drove us along in a little cart that had been painted in zebra stripes. Every so often he would peer at us in the rearview mirror with a look of weariness. Jacobs could not grasp why the media had focused on Billy when there were so many other animals at the zoo whose stories sometimes bordered on the miraculous. “The Los Angeles Zoo has successfully raised condors, bringing them back from the brink of extinction, but nobody ever talks about that,” he said, adding that one of the orangutan’s air sacs had been surgically removed in a groundbreaking operation.

The Los Angeles Zoo also has among the largest collections of chimpanzees in the country and is only 1 of 14 zoos in North America to house François’ langurs, an endangered leaf-eating monkey. In some cases the most interesting thing about the animals is how they came to be at the zoo. Many of the reptiles were confiscated from a Malaysian smuggling ring, and customs agents at LAX once donated a baby pangolin, a Congolese anteater prized for its delicate meat. This one was too young to eat when captured, so hunters sold it to some tourists who tried to bring it back to Sherman Oaks in a basket. “And then there was Alfred the blind sea lion,” Jacobs said. “He washed ashore with head trauma, and we decided to take him in, and now he’s sired offspring.”





When we pulled up to Elephants of Asia, Tina and Jewel were sunning themselves in the yard. Across the way was a pavilion where people could learn how much the creatures eat and defecate and similar details. “After rainstorms elephants move toward the rainy spots, looking for tender new grasses,” one of the signs read. Other signs explained how you could text money to help resolve the human-elephant conflicts in Cambodia. “People can actually make donations right there to that fieldwork,” Lewis said.

Billy was in the barn in his elephant restraint device. Up close he was massive, with speckled, leathery skin and tiny eyes. Behind him there were rows of empty stalls. Two had padded floors on which a baby might someday be born. Lewis appeared resigned to the fact that a fertile female would not be arriving in the foreseeable future. The AZA has instituted new guidelines, he explained, stipulating that groups of bonded elephants should not be split up. “Our hope is if there is a pair of females somewhere and one dies...” Lewis said. If that didn’t work, the zoo was prepared to house a bachelor herd. “One of the things that all the zoos are dealing with now is that if we’re going to breed elephants, 50 percent are going to be bulls,” he said, noting that three of the larger stalls had been sized and reinforced for male elephants. In the meantime the zoo was continuing to attempt to collect Billy’s sperm. “This is where it all happens,” Lewis said, referring to the elephant restraint device. But things had not happened as planned. Though Billy tolerated the prostate massage, thus far he had refused to ejaculate. “We may have to call in experts,” Lewis said.

By that Lewis no doubt meant Thomas Hildebrandt, who was trying to get the African sperm past customs agents in Europe and America. He was also monitoring the menstrual cycle of female zoo elephants on both continents to determine which should receive it. The process would be costly and complicated, involving three-meter catheters, light-emitting endoscopes, video monitors, and a staff of at least eight. It has proved unreliable as well. A female at the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle has reportedly been inseminated more than 100 times to no avail. And since the first procedure took place in 2000, nearly half of the 50 babies conceived through artificial insemination have died—14 of them in utero or at birth. Eight never made it to their fifth birthdays.

In June 2012, the lawsuit finally went to trial, and the zoo had done all it could to cast doubt on the legitimacy of PAWS. Jason Jacobs noted that the facility was not accredited by the AZA, that it didn’t allow visitors without appointments, and that it didn’t have 24-hour veterinary service like the zoo. “Sanctuaries are for animals who don’t have options,” he told *L.A. Weekly*, as if PAWS were a halfway house for unwanted elephants. Zoo supporters went so far as to suggest that the facility was so large, people who wanted to visit Billy might not be able to see him through the foliage. The campaign appeared to have its intended effect. According to pollsters hired by the zoo, the majority of those surveyed believed that “closing the habitat and shipping Billy to a distant location would deprive local schoolchildren and their families of the opportunity to learn about the threat of extinction facing Asian elephants today.”

But now the zoo would be forced to make sound legal arguments against the expert witnesses assembled by Casselman. There was Joyce Poole, who would be flying in from Norway; Lori Marino, a professor of neuropsychology at Emory University; renowned zoo designer David Hancocks from Australia; and veterinarians appalled by Billy’s condition. The zoo couldn’t discredit all that expertise, so instead it tried to discredit the relevance of their testimony. To this end the city attorney representing the zoo sought to bifurcate the universe of elephants into two distinct groups: those that live in the wild and those that live in zoos. This would enable the zoo to argue that while the plaintiffs’ witnesses may be knowledgeable about wild elephants, they knew little about zoo elephants, of which there was only one true expert: the zoo industry itself. As Lewis explained, “We have experience caring for animals in the zoo, and that can be very different from the way animals care for themselves in the wild.”

The legal strategy was undermined by the zoo’s own witnesses, most of them zoo staff. For instance,   t of captive elephants are prone to arthritis and other ailments related to the soil in their enclosures being too

compacted by their great weight. During the course of the dispute, Lewis had assured the city that the zoo went to tremendous lengths to protect Billy's feet by rototilling the soil every few days to keep it from hardening. The zoo's witnesses, however, testified that the new enclosure had never once been rototilled. They also testified that the Elephants of Asia exhibit was not all that Lewis had claimed it would be to the city council. Of the six acres he promised, only two were accessible to Billy, partly because the enclosure had been subdivided to keep him away from the females and partly because the vegetation throughout his pen had been electrified to prevent him from devouring it.

The most noteworthy revelation pertained to the zoo's animal behavior department, on whose opinions Lewis had based his claims that Billy's rocking motion was not a sign of distress. During the trial it was revealed that the department head, Cathleen Cox, specialized in primates. Cox testified that she had no firsthand experience with pachyderms and had never even read a book about one; Billy was the only elephant she'd ever known. As for Billy's keeper, Vicky Guarnett, she maintained she knew in her heart that he was happy.

The judge was unconvinced. His decision began with the line "All is not well at the Elephants of Asia exhibit at the Los Angeles Zoo," and it grew worse from there as he recounted the misleading statements made by the zoo and commented on the ignorance of its staff, which he described as suffering from an "anthropomorphic fantasy that the elephants are happy...in captivity." As appalled as the judge was by the goings-on at the zoo, however, he did not see that it met the legal definition of cruelty or negligence. And so Elephants of Asia was not shut down, and Billy was not sent to the sanctuary. The zoo was simply ordered to rototill the soil in Billy's enclosure and exercise him more.

If Lewis found the revelations embarrassing, he gave no indication in public. "It's the zoo version of, 'Do you still beat your wife?'" he told the *Los Angeles Times* when the trial ended. A few days later the zoo posted a coloring book drawing of an elephant on its Web site, stating, "Asian elephants are an endangered species threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation," and that for every colored-in elephant sent in, the zoo would donate \$1 to conservation programs in Sri Lanka and Cambodia.

Casselman and the zoo appealed the judge's ruling, but the lawsuit has since been eclipsed by other events. In August 2012, a month after the trial ended, the Vienna Schönbrunn Zoo held a press conference to announce that one of its females had been impregnated with the defrosted sperm of an elephant named Steve, who resides at the Phinda private game reserve in South Africa. The director of the zoo held up an ultrasound of the fetus, whose trunk and large ears were unmistakable. A year later the baby was born, and in May 2014, a second was born in England, also from Steve's sperm, and two more females have since been inseminated.

When I spoke to Hildebrandt afterward, he seemed both elated and sad. He knew the elephants that he helped bring into the world would not be normal in the true sense of the word. "Elephants in zoos will never have behavior like they do in the wild," he said. "That's for sure." As he saw it, though, the only answer to this problem was to breed more of them. If he could do that, he might at least create larger groups that approximate the normal herd structure in the wild. This, in turn, might make the elephants less neurotic and possibly even more fertile. "The most important element in the life of an animal is offspring," he said, "and having elephants with babies will be ten times better than what we have now." There was no time to dispute the ethics. "All we can hope for is that the zoos improve," Hildebrandt said, adding that he thinks they are.



The African elephant sperm he's collected is now being stored in cryobanks in Europe. As of early summer, he had not been able to get it through the red tape of U.S. Customs, nor had he found a way to freeze the sperm of Asian elephants. But success on both fronts is surely imminent, and the zoos of North America are readying themselves for it. In the last three years alone Oklahoma City spent \$13 million on a new enclosure that hopes to house 5, and the Denver Zoo spent \$55 million, where 12 could live. This year Wichita's Sedgwick Zoo announced it was breaking ground on a \$10 million exhibit wherein visitors will be able to boat alongside the elephants. And next year the Oregon Zoo plans to open an exhibit that is expected to cost nearly \$60 million, with room for a dozen.

So far no zoo seems to be going the route Casselman and Doyle have strongly recommended to the L.A. Zoo: Casselman had hoped to persuade it to replace Billy with an animatronic elephant. He envisioned children climbing atop it so as to better appreciate its massiveness and the complexity of its trunk, while Doyle envisioned interactive consoles and giant screens projecting live feeds from a national park in Kenya. It is more than likely that Billy will live out the rest of his days at Elephants of Asia, where he continues rocking back and forth before tens of thousands of visitors each year. But if and when he produces enough viable sperm, Doyle sees a new legal battle over who will control it. "After all," she says, "doesn't it technically belong to the taxpayers of Los Angeles?"

Tamar Brott is a writer based in Oakland. Her story about dog trainer Vladislav Roytapel appeared in the May 2009 issue.

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FREE



BILLY

**40 YEARS OLD | MALE | ASIAN | WILD
LOS ANGELES ZOO (LOS ANGELES, CA)**

Billy is a wild-born male Asian elephant who has spent all but one year of his life in captivity. Born roaming freely with his familial herd in Malaysia around 1985, Billy was captured less than a year after his birth. In 1989 he was imported to the United

States and brought to the Los Angeles Zoo. For the majority of the time Billy has been confined at the zoo, he has been held alone in a barren enclosure. Captivity in such an impoverished environment causes brain damage by subjecting elephants to extreme psychological stress. For decades, Billy has been observed engaging in stereotypic behavior, most frequently intense head bobbing, which is a coping mechanism for dealing with stress.

TAKE ACTION >

BILLY'S STORY

Billy is a wild-born male Asian elephant who has spent all but one year of his life in captivity. Born roaming freely with his familial herd in Malaysia around 1985, Billy was captured less than a year after his birth. In 1989 he was imported to the United States and brought to the Los Angeles Zoo.

A 1989 training **video** shows Billy being repeatedly jabbed and led around by a bullhook, a weapon-like device that is used to control elephants through the infliction of pain. In the video, a zoo employee talks about chaining Billy and using the bullhook in various ways to exert control over him, such as touching Billy's hypersensitive body parts. In 1993, Billy was sent to Have Trunk Will Travel, most likely for training to submit to human commands. Have Trunk Will Travel was a notorious traveling entertainment operation that had been plagued by allegations of **extreme cruelty** to elephants. In 1994, Billy returned to the Los Angeles Zoo where he has remained ever since.

In 2012, a lawsuit was brought against the Los Angeles Zoo regarding its treatment of elephants, and the extent of the physical abuse Billy endured—in what the zoo referred to as “training”—was laid bare. After a trial, the presiding judge **wrote**: “The evidence shows that when Billy was much younger, trainers formerly with the Los Angeles Zoo trained him to lie down using a block and tackle. Trainers also used a bull hook, a stick with a nail, or other similar tool. When elephants that were trained or ‘broken’ with a bull hook are subsequently shown a bull hook or an object that looks like a bull hook, they (quite understandably) become afraid, and comply with requests by the trainer or keeper. [The Los Angeles Zoo director] confirmed that if an elephant has been hurt by a bull hook in the past, the elephant will react negatively if a keeper merely shows or displays a bull hook.”

The Los Angeles Zoo has just 3 acres of usable outdoor space for elephants, which is divided into 4 yards. For the majority of the time Billy has been confined at the zoo, he has been held alone in a barren enclosure. Captivity in such an impoverished environment causes brain damage by subjecting elephants to extreme psychological stress. For decades, Billy has been observed engaging in stereotypic behavior, most frequently intense head bobbing, which is a coping mechanism for dealing with stress.

Billy has been forced to participate in the **Association of Zoos and Aquariums’ captive breeding program**. Public records reveal that during a three year period, the zoo attempted to collect Billy’s semen at least 55 times. The semen collection procedure was a gross violation of Billy’s autonomy, in addition to being a great risk to his health and safety. It often involved placing Billy in an elephant restraint device, rendering him unable to freely move, and having a human insert their arm into his anus and massage his prostate to stimulate ejaculation. **Despite years of semen collection attempts, Billy has never sired any offspring. The most recent AZA Asian Elephant Population Analysis and Breeding &**

Transfer Plan recommends that Billy continue to be used for breeding purposes.

In addition to enduring traumatic trainings, long-term isolation, and grotesque semen collection procedures, Billy has also suffered from inadequate foot care—for elephants held in small captive environments, foot care is incredibly important. Foot disease is a leading **cause** of death in captive elephants. Records from 2023 show that the zoo did not perform regular foot care on Billy for eight months while he was in **musth**, resulting in overgrown nails and a significant accumulation of dead tissue.

There has been a long campaign, spanning decades, calling for Billy's release to an elephant sanctuary where his complex physical and psychological needs can be met. Celebrities such as **Bob Barker**, **Lily Tomlin**, and **Cher** have championed his freedom. Over 800,000 people have signed a **petition** calling for his release to sanctuary. Several Los Angeles City Council members have introduced **multiple** motions over the years to **close** the zoo's elephant exhibit or **relocate** Billy to a sanctuary. The Los Angeles Times' Editorial Board **wrote** a powerful article advocating for Billy's transfer to a sanctuary.

Despite the public outcry regarding Billy's plight, zoo officials have steadfastly refused to grant him a measure of freedom that was stolen from him. They justify his captivity by claiming he plays an important role in conservation by serving as an ambassador for his species, but nothing could be further from the truth. Seeing an elephant suffering day in and day out, in an unnatural space and engaging in behaviors unseen in the wild, serves no legitimate purpose. If anything, Billy is an ambassador for why confining elephants in zoos is an archaic and shameful practice, one that future generations will rightly view with moral outrage. The judge in the 2012 lawsuit against the Los Angeles Zoo recognized as much, when he wrote: "Captivity is a terrible existence for any intelligent, self-aware species, which the undisputed evidence shows elephants are."

Billy is not living at the Los Angeles Zoo; he is deteriorating as zoo officials look on. For once, the zoo must prioritize Billy's interests before its own and relocate him to a sanctuary that can meet his complex needs.

TAKE ACTION TODAY

A future where no elephant has to endure the traumas of being torn from their families and natural habitats, bred against their will, and shipped from zoo to zoo is possible, and we need your help to make it a reality.

TAKE ACTION >

SUBMIT INFORMATION

Do you have a tip for us? The Free to be Elephants project relies on our supporters to keep us up-to-date with the latest news, updates and photos about elephants in their local facilities. Use this form to submit your info and help us expose the reality of elephant captivity across America.

Drop files here or
SELECT FILES

Accepted file types: jpg, png, gif, mov, mp4, avi, Max. file size: 50 MB, Max. files: 5.

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**End Elephants Billy & Tina's Torment At
The Los Angeles Zoo, Send Them To
Sanctuary, Not Another Zoo!**

**End Elephants Billy & Tina's Torment At
The Los Angeles Zoo, Send Them To
Sanctuary, Not Another Zoo!**

Supporters

18129



UPDATE: The Los Angeles Zoo recently announced its plan to send Billy and Tina to the Tulsa Zoo in Oklahoma, defying the years of advocacy by impassioned activists, renowned elephant experts and lawmakers to send them to a true sanctuary. Please sign this alert to keep the pressure on the zoo to honor the will of those who want these elephants to finally experience the peace and freedom they deserve. Speak up, call and write to the zoo with the message: not another zoo!

Elephants Tina and Billy are two decades apart in age, but two factors unite them: their many years of suffering at the Los Angeles Zoo and the obvious stress they endure as evidenced by their advanced zoochotic behavior. Act now to send these beleaguered elephants to a sanctuary where they can rest and heal from their years of anguish at the LA Zoo.

End Billy & Tina's Torment At The LA Zoo



Tina, born in the wild, was ripped from her home in Asia and now at 58 has spent all but one year of her life in captivity. Billy was snatched from his home in Malaysia at just 4 years old and has existed in a zombie-like state at the zoo for 35 years.

Tina's Story

At just 1 year old, Tina was separated from her mother and family and shipped across the world to be exploited in circuses in the U.S. For over 30 years, she was punished with bullhooks to perform tricks. In 2009, she and her circus mate, Jewel, were confiscated from their abusive trainer by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and sent to the San Diego Zoo. One year later, she and Jewel landed at the Los Angeles Zoo where Tina remains today.

Sadly, her longtime companion Jewel died in 2023, and not long after, another zoo inmate, Shaunzi, died, leaving Tina alone and grieving over now two losses. Despite her zoo-related ailments including joint disease and arthritis, her medical records indicate that Tina is doing well overall for her age. Therefore we can conclude that she is fit for transport to sanctuary. It is imperative that she goes soon before her health takes a downward turn and she dies like Shaunzi and Jewel before her.



Billy's Story

Billy has been alone for his entire 35 years at the LA Zoo. He was introduced to the three elderly females but spent little of his life in their company. Instead every day, for hours on end, Billy continually rocks, sways, or paces back and forth on his 1-acre yard.

The zoo's medical records indicate that his feet were left untreated for eight months while he was in musth, a periodic reproductive phase. As a result, the conditions of Billy's feet are described by a former elephant keeper as abysmal and clearly show he is living in pain. The lack of treatment has left him vulnerable to fatal foot disease. The zoo's inability to care for him is a prime indicator that he should be retired from the zoo.

Billy was also subjected to dozens of highly invasive procedures to extract sperm with no success. Billy has endured enough misery, it is time for him to be released from his hellish experience at the LA Zoo and given the gift of freedom and expert veterinary care he so richly deserves.

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Elephants Assaulted in the Wild to Increase Zoo Populations

End Elephant
Exploitation

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Elephants Assaulted in the Wild to Increase Zoo Populations

January 26, 2024 - Posted by Courtney Scott

TAG: ELEPHANTS, ZOOS

Elephants die faster than they can reproduce in zoos. In desperation to increase their population of elephants, zoos have resorted to stealing sperm from elephants in the wild.

Operation Frozen Jumbo 3 is underway in Kruger National Park, South Africa. It's a collaboration with zoo organizations around the world, expanding on a sperm extraction procedure dubbed "Sperminator."

Freezing sperm to inseminate female elephants has been fraught with failure in the wild and in captivity. Now this dreadfully cruel and inefficient process has been refined and is able to get more pregnancies from fewer invasive procedures. However, what is the cost of this success for the elephants?

Elephant semen



"Forcing captive and wild male elephants into involuntary sperm extraction, sometimes via chemical immobilization, and then coercively inseminating female elephants without their choice of partner, is rape. These violations, hidden behind the guise of conservation, are a trespass on personal autonomy and remove all choice and control over an individual's outcomes or mates."

— Les O'Brien, Elephant Consultant and former Zoo Elephant Keeper



It is a gruesome operation for the elephants. As reported in the Boston Globe: "First, the vet inserts a pump into the elephant's rectum and fills the intestines with an enormous quantity of water — to create space that makes an ultrasound exam possible. Next, he inserts an electric stimulation device into the animal's rectum to initiate orgasms to produce sperm."

After the unconscious elephant's tail, tusks, penis, and testes are measured, the vets collect the blood and DNA and finally inject him with the antidote to wake him. Many elephants have been subjected to this extraction in the wild and captivity with little success.

"Elephants, when protected in their natural home-range habitats, live active lives and fulfill crucial ecological roles as keystone species, ecosystem engineers, and seed dispersers – contributions obstructed by human interference and forced imprisonment. In their countries of origin, natural environments where elephants are well-protected have witnessed a rise in their wild numbers, free from artificial insemination (AI) and other human intervention."

— Les O'Brien, Elephant Consultant and former Zoo Elephant Keeper

At In Defense of Animals, we believe we should leave wild animals alone in the one place where they can genuinely live wild and free. Instead, zoos are tampering with nature, creating unnecessary trauma for these majestic elephants and populating zoos with more elephants who will live out deprived lives in captivity. Disturbingly, research needs to be done into how much this invasion into wild herds disrupts elephant societies.

"If captive zoo environments were truly the utopias advertised by zoos, the need for artificial insemination (AI) would be non-existent. Strikingly, behaviors such as infanticide, fratricide, the inability to reproduce, and stereotypies, to name but a few, observed exclusively in captive elephants, are absent with free-ranging elephants. AI exacerbates the suffering of elephants and will only add to the species decline, not save it."

— Les O'Brien, Elephant Consultant and former Zoo Elephant Keeper

You can help to free one captive elephant to a sanctuary, where he will never be forced to endure any more invasive sperm extraction procedures. Please take action now to **[free Billy from the Los Angeles Zoo](#)**.

[Donations to support our work](#) to free captive elephants are also needed and very much appreciated.



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Elephant Deaths at L.A. Zoo Renew Calls for Gentle Giants to Be Moved to Larger Sanctuaries

Home ranges for Asian elephants begin at a minimum of 2,471 acres, but the two left living at the city's zoo are confined to just a few acres — a circumstance activists believe to be deadly

JULIUS MILLER • FEB 2, 2024



A photo of Billy, one of the elephants at the Los Angeles Zoo.

(Photo by Glenn Koenig/Los Angeles Times via Getty Images)

Los Angeles Zoo currently stands as one of the most divisive institutions in the city, raising questions about its old sacraments.

It's no secret that under the Zoo's supervision, 16 elephants have died since it opened in 1966. Two of those came in the past year, with Shaunzi, a 53-year-old female Asian elephant being euthanized in January 2024 and Jewel, a 61-year-old female meeting the same fate just 12 months earlier, the [Los Angeles Times](#) previously reported.

L.A. Zoo tacked up Shaunzi's cause of death to "her age, past medical history" and her "inability to right herself with supportive efforts to raise her." However, their shrouded explanation veers away from the

expected: Shaunzi and other Asian elephants that have died may have suffered as a result of their constructed habitats.

Lights were placed around a photograph of a 53-year-old female Asian elephant named Shaunzi outside the Los Angeles Zoo, who was euthanized at the start of 2024.

(Francine Orr/ Los Angeles Times via Getty Images)

“I would say all of them [the elephants] died from that [a lack of space] because it accumulates over time,” Courtney Scott, Elephant Consultant for [In Defense of Animals](#), tells *Los Angeles* magazine.

“They have arthritis, they have joint disease, they have zoonotic behavior... there’s another study that shows they develop brain damage from lack of stimulation and space,” she adds.

The [study in question](#) comes from the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation, an animal welfare organization in the United Kingdom. Not only does it reveal that “elephants in zoos stereotyped less, explored more, and showed more behavioral diversity in bigger enclosures than smaller ones,” but it also found that home ranges for Asian elephants begin at a minimum of 2,471 acres. Comparatively, Los Angeles Zoo’s elephant population currently [lives](#) in a 3.6 to 6.56-acre space.

“10 acres is considered large for a city zoo... The Houston Zoo has 12 elephants in three acres, so even if there was only one elephant, it’s unbelievably inadequate,” Scott says. “In captivity, they live about half as long on average.”

The IDA has recently honed in on Billy, an elephant that has been at L.A. Zoo since 1989. Zoo officials describe him and their other current resident, Tina, as “ambassadors for their endangered species” and say they must remain as “millions of Angelenos with the opportunity to establish meaningful, empathy-building connections with animals they might otherwise never see.”

Scott says the zoo continually utilizes such anthropomorphic language, or the attribution of human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human beings. A similar example of such is Packy, a 54-year-old Asian elephant at the Oregon Zoo who was born into captivity and euthanized in 2017.

“They’ve constantly said that Packy was the ambassador and he was even the head of a parade, even though he wasn’t there,” Scott recalls. “Well, Pakky had no clue what that was, and he was just exploited for 55 years at the zoo.”

Many say to move Billy to a sanctuary, which, as per the aforementioned report, “are founded on a fundamental belief in the need for quality space — far bigger in size and more diverse in contact than any zoo enclosure.” However, L.A. Zoo clearly states on its site that “there is absolutely no reason for them to be sent to live in a sanctuary,” referencing their status as an “AZA-accredited facility.”

Marielle Williamson, left, joins other activists during a rally with In Defense of Animals, Elephant Guardians of Los Angeles and Los Angeles Animals for Animals at the Los Angeles Zoo on Sunday, Jan. 28, 2024 in Los Angeles, CA.

(Dania Maxwell / Los Angeles Times via Getty Images)

When protestors from the IDA and others calling for the transfer of Billy gathered outside the Zoo on Jan. 28, their presence was addressed in a similar, straightforward fashion: “The small number of activists campaigning to move Billy to another animal holding facility are basing their message on misinformation, untruths, and intentional mischaracterization of the L.A. Zoo elephant care program.”

Los Angeles magazine reached out to the L.A. Zoo to request further information on the alleged “misinformation, untruths, and intentional mischaracterizations” but never received a response.

The work done to free Billy would appear to span more than the “small number of activists” the Zoo claims. Historically, Cher, Lily Tomlin, Kim Bassinger and Bob Barker have advocated in favor of a sanctuary transfer.

“He is in pain both physically and psychologically. He spends 80% of his time rocking back and forth,” Cher told [PEOPLE](#) in 2019. “Billy is standing on hard packed dirt in a small, sterile environment. In the wild, he would be walking hundreds of miles a day on soft earth. In the zoo, Billy can’t choose what he eats at a Sanctuary he will have choices.”

Regardless, the case is still out on whether Billy will remain. A Los Angeles city committee previously [voted to send him to a sanctuary](#), but it’s yet to be approved by the L.A. City Council.

“I don't think I have time the rest of my life to get all the elephants out,” Scott joked. “But yeah, the time is coming for zoos to transition out of the old model.”

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NEWS/LOCAL

LA Zoo Takes Top Spot in List of Worst Zoos in North America for Elephants in 2023

by Gabriel Arizon, San Fernando Valley Sun/El Sol
January 17, 2024



In Defense of Animals holding a vigil Jan. 6 outside the Los Angeles Zoo to honor all the elephants who died at the zoo.
(Photo Courtesy of In Defense of Animals)

The international organization In Defense of Animals named the Los Angeles Zoo & Botanical Gardens the worst zoo in North America for elephants in 2023 due to its treatment of Billy – a 38-year-old Asian bull elephant.

In a list that includes the Houston Zoo, Denver Zoo, Oklahoma City Zoo and Oregon Zoo, the LA Zoo took the top spot owing to what the organization describes as years of zoo-related stress, loneliness and depression causing Billy's mental and physical health to decline. This is the eighth year the LA Zoo has made the organization's annual list.

Courtney Scott, elephant consultant for In Defense of Animals, said Billy exhibits some of the worst zoochotic behavior they've seen of any elephant in zoos. Zoochosis is a form of psychosis commonly observed in captive animals. It manifests as stereotypic activities that are monotonous actions with seemingly no goal or definitive objective. These actions can include head rolling, extreme licking, hair or feather pulling, striding and outline swimming.

Zoochosis appears more frequently in higher-intelligence animals, including monkeys, bears and orcas, but especially elephants.

"That is an indication that he [Billy] is under enormous stress, and he's suffering mentally and physically," Scott said. "He has the most need to get out of there before his body and his mind degenerate any further."

Scott brought up the two most recent deaths of Asian elephants in the care of the LA Zoo, 61-year-old Jewel in January 2023 and 53-year-old Shaunzi on Jan. 3, and said that unless Billy is taken to a sanctuary and begins to heal, he will likely share the same fate. Only one other elephant remains at the zoo, 57-year-old Tina.

Additionally, Scott pointed out that Billy is isolated most of the time because of musth – a naturally occurring, periodic condition in male elephants that typically lasts around two to three months characterized by heightened aggressive behavior and accompanied by a large rise in reproductive hormones. However, being isolated means that Billy has had no way to release all that energy and aggression. He's also been subject to numerous procedures to extract sperm for breeding elephants in other zoos, but those attempts failed.

"They're living with that frustration often for many months," Scott said. "Billy was in musth eight months last year, which is way longer than they would in the wild and it's because he's living in such deprived conditions."

Being in musth for that long meant zoo staff were not able to properly keep up with Billy's footcare. His daily pacing in his "puny-sized" exhibit over ground covered in urine and feces has created deep infections that could lead to fatal foot disease.

"The thing with elephants is that their bodies and their minds [have been] programmed for thousands of years to walk for miles," she continued. "It's literally what keeps them alive because if they don't move, they start degenerating. There's a lot of weight to put on their feet. They have to move to keep their muscles staying healthy and for their minds because they are intelligent. They need stimulation."

Scott said the LA Zoo has been resistant to move Billy to a sanctuary, despite the efforts of animal rights activists, attorneys and celebrities – including Cher, Lily Tomlin and Bob Barker. Even politicians have gotten involved. Former LA City Councilmember Paul Koretz introduced a motion to send Billy to a sanctuary, which was seconded by Councilmember Bob Blumenfield.

However, zoo leadership has downplayed the severity of Billy's zoochosis. In a 2012 lawsuit against the zoo, in which numerous staff were deposed, then LA Zoo Director John Lewis said that Billy's continuous head bobbing was a sign that he was anticipating food.

"Every wild elephant expert contradicted that and explained that it is not true, that it's a condition called ... zoochotic behavior," Scott said.

Currently, In Defense of Animals is focusing on closing elephant exhibits. Scott said that zoos are not a good place to keep any large exotic animal, adding that the ultimate goal is to see zoos transition to digital displays or even holograms.

The long-term goal of the organization is the closure of zoos or to have them transition to different models. Scott described one possible model – proposed by Michael Schmidt, who was a veterinarian at the Oregon Zoo – where zoos would collaborate to create large, sanctuary-like places that people could go to, but the animals would have the maximum amount of space and freedom that could be provided.

"There are all these innovative ideas out there ... so these things can be changed," Scott said. "I have been to zoos and seen animatronics [for a] huge moving dinosaur and kids were all over that thing. They loved it. So there are ways to still have a zoo but adopt different policies and different models that aren't inhumane."

The *San Fernando Valley Sun/el Sol* reached out to the LA Zoo, but they declined to comment.

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Los Angeles Zoo: Release Billy to Sanctuary!

Fight Animal Cruelty!

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Los Angeles Zoo: Release Billy to Sanctuary!

16 December 2016 - Posted by Caroline Saxon

Los Angeles Zoo: Release Billy to Sanctuary!

The Los Angeles Zoo confines three Asian elephants in a very small exhibit and operate an invasive captive breeding program. The two females, Tina and Jewel, who are in their fifties and on loan from the San Diego Zoo, live in one portion of the enclosure. On the

other side of the exhibit is the lone male elephant, Billy, abducted from his mother and family in Malaysia as an infant, and acquired by the Los Angeles Zoo in 1989. Billy is kept separate from the two females and lives in chronic isolation. Billy deserves a better life, and he needs our help.

In the wild, elephants live in complex communities and occupy hundreds of miles of natural habitat where they have room to roam and be a part of the complex social network of a herd. In contrast, Billy, Jewel, and Tina live on less than three acres, surrounded by metal bars and electric wires, with no access to the trees or foliage that surround the stark enclosure. Living space is further reduced by the segregation of Billy.

Billy's forced isolation directly conflicts with current research on the social bonds of male elephants in the wild. As infants until about the age of 14, males live within their tightly bonded, matriarchal family group. As adults, males live within a social community where lasting bonds with other male elephants are forged, as well as interaction with females on an intermittent basis. Accordingly, Billy has been and continues to be deprived of companionship, healthy movement, mental stimulation, and social learning opportunities.

In addition, Billy has been forced to endure a highly invasive procedure to collect his semen for the purpose of artificially inseminating females at other zoos to breed baby elephants. According to zoo documents, Billy underwent training for the actual semen collection process at least 55 times between January 20, 2011 and November 14, 2014.

Due to the disparity between Billy's wild homeland of Malaysia, and the artificial prison where he is currently forced to reside, the violent rupture of his attachment to his mother, and the destruction of his complex social network, Billy shows the classic signs of profound and chronic trauma.

To keep up with the latest on Billy, follow the Elephant Guardians of Los Angeles **[Facebook page](#)**.

[Click here to take action.](#)

Communication from Public

Name: Klaus Havelund
Date Submitted: 05/22/2025 05:43 AM
Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: Downtown Los Angeles (DTLA) is in a deeply troubling state. In many areas, it resembles a city in severe decline, with scenes reminiscent of the developing world. Walking its streets can be an unsettling experience—one that requires resilience and determination. Homelessness and visible drug use are widespread, creating the impression of a place with little to no law enforcement presence, almost like a scene from a Mad Max film. What's most concerning is the apparent disconnect at higher levels of leadership—there seems to be little acknowledgment of the gravity of the situation. What's urgently needed is the consistent enforcement of basic laws and a clear, public commitment from the city that it intends to address this crisis. DTLA deserves better.

Communication from Public

Name: Tari Hartman Squire

Date Submitted: 05/22/2025 06:33 AM

Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: Wednesday, May 21 at 10:00 AM LA City Hall John Ferraro Council Chamber, Room 340 200 N. Spring Street, Los Angeles CA 90012 My name is Tari Hartman Squire, CEO of EIN SOF Communications & disability activist for decades. Thank you, Budget & Finance Committee, for the opportunity to speak in support of the City of Los Angeles Department on Disability (DOD) under the leadership of Stephen David Simon and his team of hard-working professionals. I respectfully request the City Council support Budget & Finance Committee's proposal to restore key positions & funding for the Department on Disability (DOD). As a proud 2nd generation Angelino who learned civics from LAUSD, I was deeply concerned, frustrated – and, yes, angry about proposed budget cuts to DOD. Our city's billion \$ budget deficit should not be balanced on the backs of the Deaf/disability community. 7 of the 11 positions restored is a great start & essential to fortify accessibility. Thank you! DOD serves as our city's "safety net, ambassadors and bridge builders" among disability community, business and city government to propel access in the workplace, marketplace, public works, accessible public transit, emergency responses, HIV prevention funding, homelessness, disabled Veterans and excellent work to increase employment of creatives with disabilities with ReelAbilities Film Festival: LA, Lights! Camera! Access! and other vital arts programs with the power to shatter myths about people with disabilities. Thank you or your good intentions to maintain this vital Department staffing & budget to continue to keep Los Angeles a beacon of light and model of accessibility. It's in our DNA. Together with DOD, we are galvanizing media to focus on authentic casting, storytelling & accessibility that has power to shatter myths about people with disabilities – way beyond our LA own zip codes, to across the nation - and around the world. To be clear – I'm not framing Veterans, people with disabilities, homeless and seniors as "most vulnerable" but historically, they are 1st "dispensable." We can't let that happen, not here in the City of Angels. We have always been a beacon of light, hope & advancement to the nation. It's in our DNA. As a woman-owned small business focused on disability justice, and authentic representation, we must mobilize & take action - like today. Because of excellent work & integrity of DOD, we invited

them to testify at critical meetings with the US Access Board – an Independent Federal Agency charged with establishing guidelines/standards for public policy. DOD provided valuable information at the Motion Picture Academy with the Dept. Mayor and Head of LA County Film Office, Department of Economic Opportunity – and also organized/hosted a “City Day” at the Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy & Innovation that included accessibility tour with several key city departments - as we fortify accessibility in advance of the 2026 World Cup and 2028 Olympics and Paralympics. In closing... 1) accessibility is not optional. It’s a moral – and legal responsibility of all state and local governments under Title II of the ADA – celebrating 35 years this July – and therefore requires appropriate strategic planning & respect that equals resources. 2) It’s imperative DOD be fully funded to ensure citywide accessibility compliance, safety and full inclusion of Angelenos with disabilities, now, and for generations to come. Thank YOU!

Wednesday, May 21 at 10:00 AM
LA City Hall John Ferraro Council Chamber, Room 340
200 N. Spring Street, Los Angeles CA 90012

My name is Tari Hartman Squire, CEO of ESC & disability activist for decades. Thank you Budget & Finance Committee for the opportunity to speak in support of the City of Los Angeles Department on Disability (DOD) under the leadership of Stephen David Simon and his team of hard-working professionals. I respectfully request the City Council support Budget & Finance Committee's proposal to restore key positions & funding for the Department on Disability (DOD).

As a proud 2nd generation Angelino who learned civics from LAUSD, I was deeply concerned, frustrated – and, yes, angry about proposed budget cuts to DOD. Our city's billion \$ budget deficit should not be balanced on the backs of the Deaf/disability community.

7 of the 11 positions restored is a great start & essential to fortify accessibility. Thank you!

DOD serves as our city's "safety net, ambassadors and bridge builders" among disability community, business and city government to propel access in the workplace, marketplace, public works, accessible public transit, emergency responses, HIV prevention funding, homelessness, disabled Veterans and excellent work to increase employment of creatives with disabilities with ReelAbilities Film Festival: LA, Lights! Camera! Access! and other vital arts programs with the power to shatter myths about people with disabilities.

Thank you for your good intentions to maintain this vital Department staffing & budget to continue to keep Los Angeles a beacon of light and model of accessibility. It's in our DNA.

Together with DOD, we are galvanizing media to focus on authentic casting, storytelling & accessibility that has power to shatter myths about people with disabilities – way beyond our LA own zip codes, to across the nation - and around the world.

To be clear – I’m not framing Veterans, people with disabilities, homeless and seniors as “most vulnerable” but historically, they are 1st “dispensable.” We can’t let that happen, not here in the City of Angels. We have always been a beacon of light, hope & advancement to the nation. It’s in our DNA.

As a woman-owned small business focused on disability justice, and authentic representation, we must mobilize & take action - like today.

Because of excellent work & integrity of DOD, we invited them to testify at critical meetings with the US Access Board – an Independent Federal Agency charged with establishing guidelines/standards for public policy.

DOD provided valuable information at the Motion Picture Academy with the Dept. Mayor and Head of LA County Film Office, Department of Economic Opportunity – and also organized/hosted a “City Day” at the Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy & Innovation that included accessibility tour with several key city departments - as we fortify accessibility in advance of the 2026 World Cup and 2028 Olympics and Paralympics.

In closing...

1) accessibility is not optional. It’s a moral – and legal responsibility of all state and local governments under Title II of the ADA – celebrating 35 years this July – and therefore requires appropriate strategic planning & respect that equals resources.

2) It’s imperative DOD be fully funded to ensure citywide accessibility compliance, safety and full inclusion of Angelenos with disabilities, now, and for generations to come. Thank YOU!

Communication from Public

Name:

Date Submitted: 05/22/2025 07:12 AM

Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: Dear City Councilmembers, My name is Olivia Gonzalez, and I'm a resident of Council District 1 and a volunteer with the Downtown Women's Center (DWC). DWC is the only organization in Los Angeles focused exclusively on serving women and gender-diverse individuals experiencing homelessness. I'm writing to urge the Council to prioritize this population in the FY 25-26 budget by:

- Fully funding Survivor Services through CIFD with the full \$12.4 million General Fund request. With 43% of LA's unhoused population having experienced domestic or intimate partner violence, cuts to Shelter Services are unacceptable and will lead to fewer beds, fewer services, and more survivors pushed into homelessness.
- Protecting funding for Outreach programs, which are often the first step in connecting people to care. DWC's Outreach team provides direct engagement with women living on the streets, offering immediate support and building relationships that lead to access to shelter, housing, and healthcare. This outreach is crucial in meeting women where they are and helping them take the first step toward stability.
- Ensuring continued support for Access Centers, which offer trauma-informed, drop-in services and vital referrals. DWC's Access Center provides a safe space for women to access immediate care, including mental health services, food, showers, and housing referrals. It serves as an essential entry point for women ready to seek help and begin their journey to housing stability.
- Maintaining funding for Time-Limited Subsidy programs, which provide a flexible bridge to housing stability. At DWC, these programs offer financial assistance to women who need temporary support to secure permanent housing. The flexibility of Time-Limited Subsidy programs ensures that women can stabilize their lives and transition into long-term housing solutions.
- Continuing investment in employment pathways like LA:RISE, which are critical for building long-term economic security. LA:RISE is so much more than transitional employment. LA:RISE powers DWC's social enterprise, MADE by DWC, providing paid employment for women exiting homelessness - offering stability, confidence, and the opportunity to reclaim their futures. We hope you'll prioritize the programs that help women and gender-diverse individuals find safety, stability, and a path forward. Thank you for your

leadership and service to our communities. Sincerely, Olivia
Gonzalez

Communication from Public

Name: Patricia Clare Gonzalez

Date Submitted: 05/22/2025 07:41 AM

Council File No: 25-0600

Comments for Public Posting: Good afternoon City Councilmembers, My name is Patricia C. Gonzalez I'm a resident of Council District 1, and I am a former board member and current volunteer of DWC. I am here to raise concern about the impact this budget may have on women and gender-diverse individuals experiencing homelessness. I urge the Council to support this population by:

- o Fully funding Survivor Services through CIFI with the full \$12.4 million General Fund request.
- o Protect funding for Outreach programs, which are often the first connection to housing and care.
- o Ensure continued support for Access Centers, which provide trauma-informed drop-in services and vital referrals.
- o Maintain Time-Limited Subsidy programs, which offer a flexible bridge to housing stability.
- o Continue investment in employment pathways like LA:RISE, which build long term economic security.

• Thank you,
Patricia