

LICENSE TO BREED LARGE CARNIVORES

Phone: (517) 373-8080
<http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa>

House Bill 5092 as reported from committee

Sponsor: Rep. Matthew Bierlein

Committee: Regulatory Reform

Revised 10-28-25

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

(Enacted as Public Act 34 of 2025)

SUMMARY:

House Bill 5092 would amend the Large Carnivore Act to change certain requirements for obtaining a license to breed large carnivores. As defined in the act, *large carnivore* means a lion, tiger, leopard, jaguar, cougar, or cheetah; a hybrid cross with any of those large cats; or a bear. The act allows persons that meet certain requirements to apply to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) for a large carnivore breeding license.¹ The holder of such a license must comply with specified requirements and prohibitions.² The bill would change what counts as noncompliance with certain federal standards that an applicant must meet to be eligible for a breeding license.

Currently, an applicant must meet all of the following to be eligible to apply for a breeding license:

- Conduct a for-profit or nonprofit business whose primary purpose is the presentation of animals including large carnivores to the public for education or exhibition purposes.
- Not allow a patron to come into direct contact with a large carnivore.
- Not sell large carnivores, except to another person that meets these requirements for a large carnivore breeding license.
- Have and maintains a class C (exhibitor) license under the federal regulations contained in 9 CFR parts 1 and 2.³
- Meet or exceed all standards required of a class C licensee under 9 CFR parts 1 and 2, including at least standards for training, housing, care, and transport of large carnivores. A licensee is considered *not* to meet this requirement if during the last five years the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has confiscated an animal of the licensee, issued a finally determined direct or critical noncompliance to the licensee, or issued a civil penalty against the licensee (including a cease and desist order, monetary penalty, or license suspension or revocation).

¹ Licenses are issued under section 22b: <https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/mcl/pdf/MCL-287-1122B.pdf>

² Described in section 22c: <https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/mcl/pdf/MCL-287-1122C.pdf>

³ 9 CFR Part 2 contains the applicable regulations: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-9/chapter-I/subchapter-A/part-2>
9 CFR Part 1 defines terms used in Part 2: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-9/chapter-I/subchapter-A/part-1>

See also https://www.aphis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ac_bluebook_awa_508_comp_version.pdf In relation to these regulations, note that Class C licenses are specifically for *exhibitors*—persons whose business involves showing animals to the public for compensation, whether or not for profit, including zoos, carnivals, circuses, animal acts, and educational exhibits. The term *exhibitor* generally does not include pet stores, horse races, livestock shows, state or county fairs, rodeos, field trials, coursing events, falconry, dog or cat shows, bird fancier shows, or other agricultural fairs or exhibitions.

The bill would retain the first four bulleted requirements above. With regard to the last one, the bill would still require the applicant to meet or exceed all standards required of a class C licensee under 9 CFR parts 1 and 2, but it would no longer refer to specific standard areas. More substantively, under the bill, a person would be considered *not* to meet this requirement if during the last five years any federal or state license held by the person has been suspended or revoked or if during the last five years the person has been made subject to a cease and desist order.

MCL 287.1122a

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

According to testimony from representatives of the Detroit Zoo and the John Ball Zoo in Grant Rapids, each zoo is at risk of losing its eligibility for a breeding license for large carnivores due to receiving a critical noncompliance notice from the USDA in the prior five years. Under current state law, this would disqualify each zoo from being able to renew its large carnivore breeding license. The zoos argue that because the critical citations resulted from incidents not involving an animal regulated under the large carnivore breeding license, those citations should not adversely impact their ability to renew their state license, which is necessary to maintain their respective accreditations through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

The Detroit Zoo incident occurred in August 2024 when a raccoon navigated multiple barriers and attacked mouse birds in the mouse bird enclosure. While the zoo said they have taken additional steps taken to improve enclosure security after an investigation, the zoo cannot have the critical citation removed or rescinded, meaning that it will be ineligible to renew its breeding license with the state. Their authorization for breeding polar bears and lions expires in January, and without passage of this bill, the breeding programs for those species would have to be discontinued at that time.

In 2023 at the John Ball Zoo, a pygmy hippo attacked a sitatunga⁴ during an attempt to introduce the animals in the hope that they could reside together in the same habitat. This incident also resulted in a critical citation.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development indicates that the bill would have no direct impact on MDARD costs or revenues.

POSITIONS:

Representatives of the following entities testified in support of the bill (10-16-25):

- Detroit Zoo
- John Ball Zoo

⁴ <https://www.woodtv.com/news/grand-rapids/john-ball-zoo-makes-changes-after-internal-review-of-fatal-pygmy-hippo-attack/>

The following entities indicated support for the bill (10-16-25):

- Binder Park Zoo
- Potter Park Zoo
- Saginaw Children's Zoo

Legislative Analyst: Josh Roesner
Fiscal Analyst: William E. Hamilton

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.