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May 19, 2025

**VIA EMAIL:**

Mayor Karen Bass  
CITY OF LOS ANGELES



**Re: URGENT – SAVE BILLY & TINA**

Dear Mayor Bass:

I am writing with an urgent plea to save Billy and Tina, the City's beloved elephants currently living at the Los Angeles City Zoo & Botanical Gardens ("LA Zoo"), from spending the rest of their life in inhumane zoo captivity. While she has refused to provide any details about how she reached the decision, the terms for their relocation or when the move will occur, LA Zoo Director Denise Verret has chosen to send Billy and Tina to the Tulsa Zoo. She does so in complete disregard for the well-established science that confinement at a zoo – any zoo, no matter how expensively renovated or expanded – is a death sentence for elephants, preceded by physical agony and acute mental suffering. ***Billy and Tina have been living in captivity at the LA Zoo for decades under abysmal conditions and they have suffered enough.*** They both exhibit symptoms of zoochosis, including functionless, repetitive motions such as rocking, swaying and head bobbing (stereotypic behaviors). Both of these majestic, highly intelligent, sensitive and social animals deserve to be retired to a true elephant sanctuary. ***You are the only one who can make sure they live their twilight years with liberty and dignity.***

Scientific knowledge about elephants and the detriments of zoo captivity has rapidly increased. The conclusion is that, no matter how hard a zoo tries, it is nearly impossible to humanely keep elephants in traditional zoos. In recognition of the scientific consensus that elephants do not thrive in captivity and evolving standards of animal welfare legislation and ethics, the trend across the United States and throughout the world is to move away from keeping elephants in captivity in zoos. We believe that Los Angeles should be at the forefront of this science-backed movement. You have the opportunity to lead the way.

The dire urgency of the situation cannot be understated. ***We are informed that her transfer (and potentially the transfer of both Tina and Billy) will take place tonight or tomorrow under the cover of darkness and obfuscation.*** For weeks, Tina has been bound with shackles (as pictured below), and now Billy is in chains like a prisoner too. This indicates that their transport is imminent.



Dr. Chris Draper, an international expert in animal behavior, care and management (including, specifically, elephants in captivity at zoos as compared to elephants at genuine sanctuaries), explained why this recently-captured image of Tina “causes [him] grave concern”: *“This photograph appears to show Tina with manacles – straps or webbing-covered chains – on her wrists and ankles. Manacles are sometimes used as a shortcut to move elephants in captivity who are reluctant to get into a travelling crate on their own. Manacles can cause elephants severe physical injuries and psychological trauma as well as long-term musculoskeletal problems, and are widely criticized as being inhumane. The risk to Tina is particularly acute given her current age and health. In my professional opinion, it is reckless and irresponsible to proceed with any transfer in light of this evidence without fully examining why she is in shackles and exploration of alternative methods.”* In the past, the LA Zoo has killed two elephants while trying to move them. Ms. Verret’s current plan may result in Tina’s death raising this number to three. We beg you: do not let that happen.

It would be unconscionable for the City to transfer Billy and Tina to the Tulsa Zoo at any time, but particularly now. Currently, there is a severe weather event unfolding in Tulsa, Oklahoma with tornado warnings issued in and around the city. Moving Billy and Tina to the Tulsa Zoo under these life-threatening conditions is reckless and cruel.

Dr. Draper’s first-hand observation of the conditions at the “Elephant Experience and Preserve” on May 10, 2025 confirms that, even though it boasts a slightly larger elephant exhibit, the Tulsa Zoo is an inhumane place for Billy and Tina to be relocated. The five Asian elephants currently living there are separated and housed in relatively small yards; in fact, one of the yards housing two elephants “was disturbing small, even by zoo standards, with no opportunity for the elephants to get away from each other if they wanted to do so.” None of the elephants had access to the purported “ten acre preserve,” which was closed and out of use because of severe flooding. The entire exhibit, including the “preserve” area, is flat with no variation in topology or terrain. This deprives the elephants of opportunities for natural movement and exercise. Dr. Draper observed that “[a]ll five of the elephants . . . lack[ed] muscle tone and were not in optimal body condition,” and one had a cracked nail (a result of walking on compacted dirt or concrete, and one that can result in painful and life-threatening infections). When the “preserve” becomes useable, the elephants will

not have unrestricted access because the Tulsa Zoo cannot put all five elephants together in such a relatively small space. The design of the “preserve” reflects the Tulsa Zoo’s top priority: human entertainment. It is reached by crossing a visitor train track, which restricts the elephants’ ability to move freely between the “preserve” and the yards and barns that form the remainder of the elephant exhibit. Dr. Draper also raised serious concerns about the lack of adequate shaded areas for the elephants to use on hot and sunny days; where Billy and Tina would be housed and whether they could be safely and successfully integrated; and whether the Tulsa Zoo has adequate staff and resources to care for seven elephants (more than double the elephant population there in 2020, just five years ago). Once Billy and Tina are sent to the Tulsa Zoo, there is nothing to stop them from being shuffled to other (and potentially even more inadequate) zoos.



These pictures speak a thousand words, and their message could not be clearer: ***The Tulsa Zoo is no place for Billy and Tina.*** Their suffering will only continue if they are sent there. Only a sanctuary can provide the resources, space and elephant-centric environment that Billy and Tina need after all they have been through. As Dr. Draper explains: “ *Accredited elephant sanctuaries . . . offer significantly more space, enough to allow elephants to start to heal physically and emotionally and engage in a more natural range of behaviors. Zoos that make modest improvements offering slightly more space do not, and cannot, compare to the space and natural habitat an accredited sanctuary can provide.*” Zoo captivity of elephants does not belong in a civilized society.

As you are no doubt aware, Ms. Verret has stated that the cost to our City for moving Billy and Tina to the Tulsa Zoo is \$44,000. We know that you are under budget constraints right now and are laying off City employees as a result. There is no need for the City to spend thousands of dollars on the relocation of our elephants to yet another inhumane zoo. We are confident that the people of Los Angeles, including, without limitation, the list of supporters appearing on the following page, will easily raise enough money to cover the cost of retiring Billy and Tina to true elephant sanctuaries. The funds currently allocated to the Tulsa Zoo transfer can be used to save jobs and provide other resources to the City.

Billy and Tina need your help. We, the concerned residents of Los Angeles who love these elephants, need your help. Together, we can ensure that Billy and Tina are retired to a genuine elephant sanctuary. This is the only option that is truly in their best interest and is backed by science. We urge you to rise to the occasion and demonstrate your compassionate leadership by protecting those who do not have a voice.

Sincerely,

MARTIN D. SINGER

&

MELISSA Y. GLASS

cc: Deputy Mayor Jacqueline Hamilton  
Ms. Carolyn Webb de Macías  
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