

January 30, 2009

The Honorable Charlie Crist
Governor of the State of Florida

1 page via e-mail

Dear Governor Crist:

My name is Blayne Doyle, and I am a retired Palm Bay, Fla., police officer. On February 1, 1992, I was forced to shoot and kill an 8,000-pound rampaging elephant named Janet, who had a mother and five children riding on her back when she ran amok in a circus tent full of innocent civilians. I am writing on the eve of the 17th anniversary of Janet's tragic death because I was concerned to learn from my friends at PETA that the Liebel Family Circus is using an elephant named Nosey to give rides throughout Florida. May I please meet with you or your staff to discuss the dangers associated with elephant rides and the need for a ban in Florida?

Despite the tragedy that I witnessed nearly two decades ago, circumstances for elephants in circuses have not changed. Janet's trainer, who still works as an elephant trainer in the circus industry, was later videotaped beating elephants with bullhooks—a weapon that resembles a fireplace poker with a sharp steel hook and tip—and shocking them with electric prods. And elephants are still attacking people and running amok on city streets. I hope that you will give careful consideration to what elephants endure in circuses and the risk that they pose to your constituents and enact legislation that would ban elephant rides.

I have seen my share of danger over the past four decades, but I can assure you that although I've been shot and stabbed and been in automobile, motorcycle, and airplane accidents and more than my fair share of other life-threatening situations, I have never seen a situation as frightening—or one that I was less capable of controlling—as the day that Janet snapped and ran amok. I was astonished to learn that neither the trainer nor the circus had a plan in place to deal with such a crisis.

Of special concern is the fact that, in 2004, Nosey attacked a worker during an appearance in Clinton, Iowa. The worker reported that he was tending to a water dish when the elephant hit him with her tusk, lifting him off his feet and propelling him down an incline. The worker was rushed to the hospital and received stitches for a head injury.

Allowing Nosey, or any elephant, to give rides to children is reckless and dangerous. I am still haunted by Janet's cries as she ran from the more than four dozen bullets used to stop her in Palm Bay. Would you please make elephant rides a thing of the past in Florida? Establishing legislation prohibiting elephant rides would go a long way toward protecting your community.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Blayne Doyle