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## Advocates express concern about elephants' new home

INQUIRER STAFF

The controversy over the Philadelphia Zoo's remaining two elephants has become only more intense after the announcement that Kallie and Bette will be moved to a facility in Western Pennsylvania, according to the Friends of Philly Zoo Elephants.

On Wednesday, zoo officials said the African elephants would be transferred to the Pittsburgh Zoo's 724-acre International Conservation Center in Somerset County. They will join Jackson, a male African elephant who arrived there from the Pittsburgh Zoo in December.

Marianne Bessey, who heads the Friends, said yesterday that her group strongly disagreed with the zoo's decision, preferring that the animals be sent to a 2,300-acre refuge in California run by the Performing Animal Welfare Society.

Her group fears that Kallie, 27, and Bette, 26, will be bred and exposed to health threats because of their advanced age.

"If the zoo goes through with its plans to breed Kallie and Bette, it's likely that one or both will be dead within two years," Bessey said. "With a 22-month gestation period, they would be 30 years old at their first birth, assuming they get pregnant at all, and face risky complications due to their relatively advanced age."

Bill Larson, director of communications for the zoo, said, "At this time, no one is even thinking about whether or not the elephants will be bred."

A decision to do so "will be based on very careful evaluations on an individual basis with input from the national team of experts appointed to advance elephant care and ensure the species' survival."

Kallie and Bette, Larson added, "come first."

Bessey said her group also had questions about the size of the facility's area devoted to the elephants and methods of managing the animals.


To underscore its point, the group is going ahead with a planned protest at noon tomorrow in front of the zoo at 34th Street and Girard Avenue.

In recent years, the zoo had been criticized by animal-rights activists and others who noted that the giant, social elephants had only about a half-acre in which to roam.

The zoo decided in 2005 that it did not have the money to build a better habitat and the next year announced the that its elephants would be moved.

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