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January 27, 2020

The Honorable Anna Eshoo
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Health
House Energy and Commerce Committee
United States House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Eshoo and Ranking Member Burgess:

Return to Freedom Wild Horse Conservation respectfully urges members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee to support H.R. 961, the Safeguard American Food Exports Act of 2019 (the SAFE Act), a bill with strong bipartisan support that would protect America's horses, wild and domestic, and human health, at home and abroad.

Return to Freedom (RTF) is a 22-year-old national nonprofit dedicated to preserving the freedom, diversity, and habitat of America's wild horses and burros through sanctuary, education, advocacy, and conservation, while enriching the human spirit through direct experience with the natural world. In addition to being a nationally respected voice on wild horses issues, it operates the American Wild Horse Sanctuary, which cares for 465 wild horses and 51 burros at four California locations.

RTF strongly supports the SAFE Act for a number of reasons, chief among them the ongoing protection of wild horses and burros removed from the range. Of the tens of thousands of American horses still shipped legally to Mexico and Canada for slaughter, an unknown number were once free-roaming mustangs protected by federal law.

Under a 2004 sale authority law, commonly called the "Burns Amendment," the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is directed to sell "without limitation" captured wild horses and burros ages 10 and older or younger horses who have not been adopted after three tries.

BLM has sold more than 5,900 wild horses and burros since 2005. Those sold between 2005 and 2010 went for an average of just \$17 apiece, devaluing federally protected animals that the government spends millions of taxpayer dollars annually to manage on our public lands.

Through appropriations language, Congress has repeatedly made clear that BLM and the U.S. Forest Service are not to sell wild horses and burros for purposes of slaughter. Protection of wild horses from slaughter has been a bipartisan effort under in both chambers in Congress and under both Republican and Democratic administrations.

However, even if the agency abides by the law and its own policy not to sell the kill buyers, the threat of slaughter looms: Once title is given to the wild horse's new owner,

the animal loses its protected status under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 (Act), its eventual fate unknown. Likewise, after adopters receive title after one year, a former wild horse or burro can be sold and end up auctioned off to a kill buyer.

Passage of the SAFE Act would be consistent with the spirit of the 1971 Act intended to protect these icons of the West and with the wishes of the American people, as expressed consistently in public opinion polls in which they overwhelmingly support the protection of wild horses and opposition to slaughter, and of bipartisan members of Congress.

Domestic horses

As an organization focused on the welfare of horses, generally, and on educating the public about their importance to our country's history and culture, RTF also supports the SAFE Act on behalf of domestic horses, which do not deserve an inhumane end. Horses remain our companions and partners in competition, work and recreation, and those that roam our public lands remain a symbol of freedom throughout the world.

RTF's legislative representative, Chris Heyde, initiated the national campaign to end horses slaughter in 2001 and is one of the few to have been inside operating a horse slaughter facility operating in the United States, gone undercover at auctions across the country and tracked trucks hauling horses to Mexico and Canada.

In 2016-17, RTF played an instrumental role in preventing horses impounded by the State of South Dakota from being sent to auction where kill buyers were waiting, helping to rehome more than 900 across the country – proof that Americans stand ready and willing to help horses in need. In all, RTF has helped rescue some 2,000 horses, including those at its sanctuary.

In the first 11 months of 2019, more than 59,000 American horses were shipped to their deaths in Mexico and Canada. That includes 49,708 through November to Mexico and 9,986 through September to Canada, from which available statistics lag by two months.

While the numbers remain horrific, it appeared that horse exports for slaughter were on pace to drop for the seventh straight year, down from a 19-year high of 166,572 in 2012.

The steady decline is all the more reason for Congress to end the inhumane work of kill buyers, yet the 2007 shuttering of the last horse slaughterhouse in the United States. While not the ultimate solution or our goal from the start, RTF has worked hard to ensure a defund amendment is included in federal funding bills with bipartisan support.

Supported year after year by Appropriators, the language prohibits the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) cannot use tax dollars to hire horse-meat inspectors. That has created an effective year-to-year ban on horse slaughter. This is effective only within U.S. borders and is only a temporary solution. It's time to make that ban permanent.

The defund amendment does nothing to stop wild horses from being trucked out of the country to Mexico or Canada. The terror, trauma and pain that horses endure in transport to slaughterhouses and on the killing floor – where they have been documented to have their throats cut while they are fully

conscious – is unacceptable. More than 90 percent of these exported horses are in “good” condition, according to a USDA study.

A threat to human health

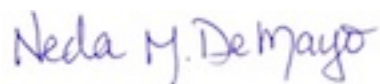
Importantly, because American horses are not raised to be eaten, they frequently are given more than 100 veterinary medications banned for human consumption by the USDA. No regulations require the sharing of information about substances previously ingested by a horse up for auction. There, horses are often purchased by kill buyers with the intent on sending them to slaughter.

In conclusion:

- When polled more than 80 percent of Americans oppose horse slaughter and a similar percentage support protecting wild horses and burros;
- Congress itself has repeatedly prevented the use of taxpayer funding to hire horsemeat inspectors and has barred government agencies from selling wild horses and burros for purposes of slaughter, all on a bipartisan basis;
- No slaughter plant has operated in the United States since 2007 and the number of horses exported for slaughter has fallen for seven straight years
- Those horses that are exported meet a brutal, inhumane end, and the meat is contaminated with dozens of medications unsafe for human consumption.

It is well past time for Congress to pass the SAFE Act to ban horse slaughter in the United States and the export of American horses abroad for slaughter. H.R. 961 enjoys overwhelming bipartisan support from a majority of House members and vast public support. RTF strongly and respectfully urges the committee to support its passage into law.

On behalf of Return to Freedom’s board of directors, honorary board and advisory board,



Neda DeMayo
President
Return to Freedom
Wild Horse Conservation

cc: Members of the Subcommittee on Health
Representative Jan Schakowsky
Representative Vern Buchanan