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May 26, 2022

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman, Committee on
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U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jan Schakowsky
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The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
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The Honorable Gus Bilirakis
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
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**RE: VETERINARY SUPPORT for H.R. 5441 Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act and
H.R.3355/S.2732 Save America's Forgotten Equines Act (SAFE)**

Dear Chairman Pallone, Chairwoman Schakowsky, Ranking Member McMorris
Rodgers, and Ranking Member Bilirakis,

On behalf of the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA), we are
writing to convey our **strong support for the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST), H.R.
5441 and the Save America's Forgotten Equines Act (SAFE) HR.3355**. HSVMA is an
association of veterinary professionals with approximately 9,000 members with a focus
on animal health and welfare.

It is not often you will find a bill where the Humane Society of the US, Humane Society
Legislative Fund, HSVMA, American Association of Equine Practitioners, American
Veterinary Medical Association, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to
Animals, American Horse Council and the Association of Prosecuting Attorney's and
hundreds of other organizations agree. Please take note! The PAST Act enjoys
bipartisan co-sponsorship, has vast support across the veterinary community, the horse
industry and law enforcement organizations.

What PAST will do

The PAST Act will incorporate important amendments to existing federal law, the Horse
Protection Act (HPA) of 1970, to finally rein in the culture of cruelty in the Tennessee
Walking Horse and other breeds' "Big Lick" community. "Soring" is a common practice
where horses are subjected to deliberate infliction of intense pain to their hooves and
legs to force them to perform an unnaturally high-stepping gait known as the "Big Lick,"
all to gain unfair competitive advantage at horse shows.

Examples of this abuse were documented in undercover investigations of top trainers
and owners in [2012](#) and [2015](#) which revealed the barbaric methods used by this
industry. As veterinarians we are uniquely qualified to report that the methods used in



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the walking horse industry to exaggerate the gait clearly shift most of the weight onto the hind legs of the horse (abnormally), causing a praying mantis type crawl, bizarrely low on the hind end while throwing their front hooves up high with each step. These movements are a desperate attempt to stop the pain caused by stepping on the ground which causes excruciating pain. Some have equated it with “walking on broken glass”. The strained tendons, laminitis (painful and chronic hoof condition), arthritis, swellings, caustic burns, abrasions, ulcers, scarring and so many more abnormalities seen routinely in these horses are obvious and painful consequences of these practices.

One does not need to be a veterinarian or an equine expert to clearly see the difference in the way a natural gaited walking horse moves compared to a “Big Lick” horse. This is NOT normal, it is not genetic, it is not acquired through training. This is torture inflicted upon horses in the name of “sport,” winning ribbons and the prestige and financial rewards that follow. It must stop.

In recent years, veterinarians have developed objective assessments for pain in horses. Some examples are Horse Chronic Pain Scale (HCPS)ⁱ, Ridden Horse Pain Ethogram (RHPE)ⁱⁱ and the Horse Grimace Scale (HGS).ⁱⁱⁱ The indicators of pain they describe such as ears back, mouth open, tongue out, change in eye position, tension of muscles around eyes and nose, head tossing or tilting, stumbling, to name just a few seem to be omnipresent in “Big Lick” horses. Seeing them in person is a heartbreaking experience for any objective equine veterinarian not deeply entrenched in this corrupt industry. The American Association of Equine Practitioners calls soring “one of the most significant welfare issues affecting any equine breed or discipline. “

Nearly 50 years ago, Congress tried to rein in this abuse by enacting the HPA, but the law is too weak and rampant soring continues. This industry had been given plenty of opportunity to self-police; it is time to end the charade. Under the PAST Act, inspectors will be legitimate, licensed and assigned by USDA, rather than industry insiders. It is not a coincidence that USDA’s own data shows that when Veterinary Medical Officers (VMOs) from USDA are involved in inspections the number of violations reported are 12-30 times higher than when Designated Qualified Persons (DQP) carry out inspections.

There are many techniques used to inspect horses but as with many “sports” unethical participants are very creative at avoiding detection. Numbing agents, punishing horses for flinching or responding to hands on examination of painful areas or even inflicting more pain on another part of the body to distract a horse are just some of the unimaginable practices used to avoid detection.

You have the opportunity to enact a law that will finally make these actions illegal, allow for objective professional inspections and increase penalties. We urge you to pass H.R. 5441

RE: Veterinary Support for Save America’s Forgotten Equines Act H.R.3355

HSVMA wants to also express our support for Save America’s Forgotten Equines Act, H.R.3355 (SAFE) Act. This bill would prevent the re-introduction of horse slaughter operations in the U.S., close our borders to the current export of American horses for slaughter abroad, and protect the public from consuming potentially toxic horse meat. Shipping “unwanted” horses to slaughter as a means of



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convenient disposal is a welfare issue that our over 9,000 veterinary professional constituents are deeply concerned about.

The thousands of horses shipped to be slaughtered outside of the U.S. include domestic pets used in working, racing, sporting events and even children's ponies. Making the decision to ship a horse to be brutally slaughtered so their meat can be sent overseas to Asia and Europe for human consumption is a violation of the human-animal bond, a betrayal of trust almost like no other. Slaughter is a brutal and terrifying end for horses. Horses are shipped for more than 24 hours at a time without food, water, or rest in crowded trucks in which the animals are often seriously injured or killed during transit.

Equines have evolved over thousands of years as prey animals, meaning they are often hunted by predators which keeps them on high alert, always afraid of danger with a heightened sense of fight or flight. As skittish animals, horses often panic while in crowded transport vehicles and in the slaughterhouse kill box, making them difficult to stun accurately--and are sometimes conscious while they are suspended by a back leg, bled out, and dismembered. In horse slaughter plants previously operated on U.S. soil, the USDA documented horrific injuries and cruelty.

As veterinarians we work with clients who agonize over end of life or end of "useful" life decisions about their horses. Most choose retirement or humane euthanasia. Shipping a horse to slaughter is the antithesis of humane euthanasia. At auctions "kill buyers" often openly outbid companion buyers or worse, pretend to be rescuers and naïve owners entrust their beloved horses to them. What does it mean to be an "unwanted" horse? Someone wanted that horse when they bought, bred, showed, raced, or used the horse as a camp pony to teach children to ride, etc. The industries that use slaughter as a convenient means of disposal of horses are losing their social license to conduct business as usual. Social media and videos able to be shared in seconds have put the reality of these industries in the spotlight. The public, your voters, do not support consumption of horse meat or horse slaughter.

The horse slaughter industry also poses serious food safety concerns to humans. Horses are regularly administered drugs and other substances that are known to be dangerous to humans or expressly prohibited by current federal regulations for use in animals intended for human consumption. Horses are gathered from random sources, and there is no system in the U.S. to track the medications and veterinary treatments given to horses to ensure that their meat is safe for human consumption.

This legislation is supported by the nation's leading animal welfare organizations, as well as many veterinarians and equine groups across the country. We join them and 83% of the American public in supporting the SAFE Act to end horse slaughter once and for all.

We urge your humane leadership in supporting both of these important animal protection and consumer safety bills.



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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lorna Grande'.

Lorna Grande, DVM
HSVMA Program Director, Education and Outreach

ⁱ Development of the Horse Grimace Scale (HGS) as a Pain Assessment Tool in Horses Undergoing Routine Castration, Emanuela Dalla Costa , et al Published: March 19, 2014,
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0092281>

ⁱⁱ The Ridden Horse Pain Ethogram, S. Dyson, First published: 15 March 2021,
<https://doi.org/10.1111/eve.13468>

ⁱⁱⁱ Objective Assessment of Chronic Pain in Horses Using the Horse Chronic Pain Scale (HCPS): A Scale-Construction Study, Johannes P. A. M. van Loon and Lucia Macri, Published online 2021 Jun 18. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/11/6/1826>