



Animal Welfare Institute

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June 23, 2022

Congressman Frank Pallone
Chair
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2322 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky
Chair
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Consumer Protection & Commerce
Subcommittee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Congressman Gus Bilirakis
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Consumer Protection & Commerce
Subcommittee
2322 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

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

On behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute, I am writing to express our strong support for H.R. 3355, the Save America's Forgotten Equines (SAFE) Act, and H.R. 5441, the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act. We are especially grateful to Congresswoman Schakowsky for her longstanding leadership on ending horse slaughter, as well as on numerous equine welfare priorities. Both the SAFE Act and the PAST Act, with 218 and 258 current cosponsors, respectively – enjoy tremendous bipartisan support. AWI greatly appreciates the Energy and Commerce Consumer Protection & Commerce Subcommittee holding a markup on these two priority equine protection bills and we hope the full Committee will swiftly mark up both so that SAFE and PAST can come to the floor of the House of Representatives in the weeks ahead.

The Save America's Forgotten Equines (SAFE) Act (H.R. 3355)

AWI initiated the national campaign to pass a federal ban on horse slaughter over twenty years ago by securing the introduction of the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act – predecessor legislation to the SAFE Act. We are encouraged by the progress that has been made on this issue in the intervening years – namely the inclusion of annual appropriations language blocking horse slaughter facilities from operating domestically, as well as the steep decline in the number of American horses exported abroad for slaughter. But until the SAFE Act is passed, tens of thousands of horses will be subjected to inhumane conditions both en route to and at slaughterhouse facilities each year.

The horse slaughter industry is a foreign-driven trade as there is no domestic market or demand for horsemeat. At the height of the export trade in 2012, over 166,000 horses were transported to Canada and Mexico to be killed for food. The American public overwhelmingly opposes horse slaughter; a 2021 poll showed that 83% of Americans support a ban on horse slaughter – a view that transcends demographics, geographic region, and party line.

The last U.S. based horse slaughter facility closed in 2007; prior to its closure, U.S. Department of Agriculture inspection reports revealed appalling mistreatment of the horses and numerous “egregious humane handling” violations. Indeed, the welfare problems associated with the horse slaughter industry are myriad. The entire process of horse slaughter – from transport conditions to stunning methods – is inherently cruel. Horses unfortunate enough to wind up in the slaughter pipeline are usually purchased from unsuspecting owners by “kill-buyers” who profit from selling the animals to foreign slaughterhouses. These horses typically endure long, overcrowded journeys without adequate food, water, or rest. Because they instinctively thrash their long necks when frightened, stunning them often requires repeated blows to the head. Consequently, horses may inadvertently remain conscious during slaughter.

Because horses are not raised for food in the United States, they are routinely given a wide range of chemical substances – including an array of common pain relievers and other medications, dewormers, and fly sprays – that are expressly prohibited by the Food and Drug Administration for use in animals raised for food. Those drugs can be toxic when ingested by humans. In direct response to this food safety threat, the European Union, a primary importer of horsemeat derived from American horses, has instituted more stringent import policies, including a ban on horsemeat sourced in Mexico (of which a significant portion derives from U.S. horses trucked across the border). From a consumer safety perspective, horsemeat has absolutely no place in the food supply.

We were heartened to see an amendment to ban the transport of equines to slaughter easily pass the full House last summer as part of the transportation and infrastructure package (H.R. 3684). AWI worked tirelessly to advance this effort which had strong bipartisan support, including from Members on this Committee. Unfortunately, the House-passed version did not move forward in the Senate. Still, with increasingly broad support and renewed momentum, closing the loophole that has allowed the export of horses for slaughter to persist, as well as enacting a long overdue permanent ban on the domestic slaughter of horses, is well within reach.

The Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act (H.R. 5441)

The Horse Protection Act (HPA) was enacted in 1970 to end the abusive practice of soring. Soring methods include applying caustic chemicals on horses’ legs, using plastic wrap and tight bandages to “cook” those chemicals deep into their flesh for days, attaching chains to strike against the sore legs, inserting hard objects such as screws and resins into tender areas of the hooves, paring the soles of the feet down to sensitive tissue, and using salicylic acid or other painful substances to slough off scarred tissue in an attempt to disguise the sored areas.

Unscrupulous trainers rely on soring to induce an exaggerated high-stepping gait for competition and shows. As USDA data and records show, soring remains a persistent and rampant problem

among Tennessee Walking Horses and related breeds. A 2010 USDA Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigation underscored the failings of the current industry self-policing scheme and the lengths to which trainers go to evade detection. The OIG audit recommended eliminating the flawed system of industry self-policing. Unfortunately, little has changed with HPA enforcement, and in 2021, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine released a report urging the USDA to discontinue its reliance on industry inspectors, and instead depend on veterinarians to inspect horses for soreness.

The PAST Act enjoys virtually unparalleled levels of support in Congress and among animal protection, horse industry, and veterinary groups. The American Horse Council, the American Association of Equine Practitioners, and the American Veterinary Medication Association all endorse the bill. After securing well over 290 cosponsors in the 116th Congress (308 by the end of the session), the PAST Act moved directly to the floor per House rules where it overwhelmingly passed by a vote of 333-96.

It is disappointing that over fifty years have gone by without a significant upgrade to the HPA. Meanwhile, horses continue to suffer from the extreme and grotesque abuses associated with soring. A 2017 attempt by USDA to finalize a rulemaking that mirrored many of the PAST Act's core components was promptly frozen by the prior administration. An urgent need exists for Congress to address this ongoing problem. By strengthening penalties, ensuring that USDA licensed and trained inspectors are enforcing the HPA, making the actual act of soring illegal, and prohibiting the use of specific devices implicated in soring, the PAST Act would implement much needed reforms to protect horses from abuse.

The Animal Welfare Institute greatly appreciates the Energy and Commerce Committee's attention to these critical equine welfare priorities. Ending the cruelty linked to horse slaughter and soring has never been closer given the remarkably strong support among Members of Congress for both the SAFE Act and the PAST Act. We respectfully ask that you advance these bills out of Committee and work with House leadership to bring them to the floor.

Sincerely,



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