



June 23, 2022

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

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

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers:

Re: Support for the SAFE Act (H.R. 3355) and the PAST Act (H.R. 5441)

The Homes for Horses Coalition (HHC) is a national network of over 500 equine rescues and sanctuaries in the United States, founded to further the goal of ending horse slaughter and advance equine protection. HHC stands in strong support of two bills before the Energy and Commerce Committee: the Save America's Forgotten Equines (SAFE) Act – led by Reps. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and Vern Buchanan (R-FL) – and the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act – led by Reps. Steve Cohen (D-TN), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), Jan Schakowsky, and Vern Buchanan.

With respect to the SAFE Act, HHC's members have unique expertise and firsthand experience when it comes to the longstanding problems associated with the predatory horse slaughter industry. Many of our member groups regularly rescue horses who are unfortunate enough to wind up in the slaughter pipeline, but most slip from owner to slaughter plant before a rescue can intervene to save them and find them a safe home.

Americans overwhelmingly oppose the practice of killing horses for food, yet tens of thousands of our horses continue to be exported annually to Canada and Mexico to be butchered in slaughterhouses. The entire process of horse slaughter – from cramped and dangerous transport conditions to stunning methods with a bolt (or several) to the horse's brain – is inherently cruel. Horses are frequently purchased at auction from unsuspecting sellers by "kill-buyers" who then profit from selling the animals to foreign slaughterhouses. These horses, who are typically healthy, sound, and young, must endure long, overcrowded journeys without adequate food, water, or rest. Not all survive the trip.

Horses are of course not raised for human consumption in this country; rather, they serve in a wide range of capacities as trusted working and performance partners and beloved companions. Horses naturally exhibit a strong fight or flight reflex; once in the kill chute, panicked horses – which are claustrophobic by nature – often severely injure themselves while instinctively thrashing in the chute in an attempt to escape the bolt gun, and rendering them unconscious often requires repeated blows to the head. Before the last horse slaughter facilities closed in the United States, the U.S. Department of Agriculture documented serious welfare problems, including horses arriving at the facilities in appalling conditions after torturous journeys.

Virtually any horse can be one bad sale from entering into the slaughter pipeline. Equine rescue groups are often the boots on the ground when it comes to saving horses from this form of cruelty – yet the predatory horse slaughter industry directly undermines the work of equine rescues as kill-buyers routinely try to outbid rescue groups in an effort to force them to expend their limited financial resources in bidding wars (thus preventing the rescue from securing a greater number of at-risk horses in a given auction). Similarly, with the rise of social media, kill-buyers increasingly post photos of horses to be shipped to slaughter along with a “bail-out” fee to be paid by individuals wishing to fund an individual horse’s rescue; the scheme is designed to turn an enormous profit from horses purchased cheaply at auctions so that kill-buyers can use the additional funding to procure many more horses.

Turning to the PAST Act, many of HHC’s members are also acutely familiar with the abhorrent practices associated with “soring”, which involves the deliberate infliction of pain to produce an artificial and grossly exaggerated gait known as “the big lick.” The Tennessee walking horse, racking horse, and spotted saddle horse breeds in particular endure extreme pain from the use of action devices including chains, the application of blistering chemicals to a horse’s forelegs, the grinding down of the hoof sole and insertion of hard objects into tender areas, pressure shoeing, the use of very tall heavy stacked horseshoes, and more. The goal of these barbaric soring tactics is to cause a horse to attempt – in vain – to avoid the pain by lifting its feet higher and faster.

The landmark Horse Protection of Act of 1970 was intended to stamp out soring, but this abuse has continued unabated. Unfortunately, an industry-run inspection system tantamount to the fox guarding the hen house, coupled with weak deterrents and punishments, has allowed this problem to fester despite the widespread acknowledgement that the status quo fails to adequately protect horses. The country watched in horror when a 2012 ABC News exposé revealed in shocking detail the unthinkable cruelty that horses subjected to soring endure. The PAST Act would implement long overdue reforms in line with recommendations from both the USDA Office of Inspector General and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine to finally combat this scourge.

As the largest national coalition of equine rescues and sanctuaries, we urge Congress to protect our nation’s cherished horses from abuse and cruelty by passing legislation to save horses from the gruesome and unnecessary fate of slaughter, as well as the horrific agony caused by soring. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on behalf of the Homes for Horses Coalition and for your attention to these two bills vital to the welfare, health, and safety of America’s horses.