

Teresa Bippen, President  
Friends of Sound Horses

Friends of Sound Horses, or FOSH, is a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to ending the abuse of soring. FOSH is an umbrella organization of 15 gaited horse breeds including the Tennessee Walking Horse, Spotted Saddle Horse and Racking Horse. FOSH has been in existence since 1998. FOSH supports the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act.

For its entire existence, FOSH has been committed to ending soring. During this time, FOSH has worked with the USDA, developed and populated the largest database in existence of Horse Protection Act (HPA) violations, built a public Internet based website with a library of all available publications on soring since 1956, sponsored three Sound Horse Conferences, researched numerous technology solutions to detect soring and attended numerous industry meetings of both performance horse or “big lick” groups and sound horse ones as well. Although we have often heard from Walking Horse industry spokesmen that the problem of soring (including shoeing abuse) is only the result of the actions of a few bad apples, the total number of HPA violation records is in the tens of thousands. This is not a problem with a few bad apples, but a whole rotten barrel. This history of ongoing violations of the law spans more than 40 years, through trainers, entire families, old names and new names and this is why FOSH has reached the conclusion, as have the other endorsers of this bill, that legislative change is the only solution to end the plague of soring of these gaited show horses. We support PAST because all of the big lick factions’ so-called guarantees and promises to bring about an end to the national disgrace of soring horses to win blue ribbons have failed.

FOSH is one of over two dozen national and international Walking Horse organizations that support the PAST Act. These organizations have been in existence for many years and do not allow padded and chained horses in their show rings. After trying to bring about change in the traditional show world for years, concerned exhibitors and spectators alike decided that they had to abandon the venues like The Celebration and the titles that come with such shows. Banning the padded and chained horse has allowed these organizations to thrive because exhibitors and spectators at their shows do not want to be surrounded by the abuse that occurs in the big lick show world nor do they want to exhibit with people who use illegal means to win a ribbon. The horses that are exhibited in these new and vibrant venues do not need stacks, chains, bands or heavy shoes in order to gait or perform. They are shown sound, without gimmicks and devices that aid and conceal the practice of soring. To ensure that that their position on soring and artificial gaits is made clear to exhibitors and the public, these organizations refuse to offer classes for big lick horses.

Through its research and experience, FOSH has determined that a combination of weak inspections, conflicted and compromised DQPs, and the failure of HIOs to report violations to USDA or the public so that the history and actions of violators can be known and monitored, have created not only a culture of acceptance in exhibiting sored horses but also a culture that routinely obfuscates and misrepresents the data and thereby attempts to deceive Congress and the public about the ongoing widespread and rampant nature of the problem. A problem that infects not only major venues like The Celebration but also the one night horse shows that are part of the culture in these breeds – and which has caused a decades-long decline in the

attendance and participation at horse shows, in the value of horses in these breeds, and in the numbers of horses bred.

A few specific examples of the lack of compliance with the Act among the big lick segment of the industry include:

1. USDA reported that at the 2012 Tennessee Walking Horse Celebration in a random swabbing for signs of foreign substances, 145 swab samples of 190 total samples tested positive for prohibited foreign substances. This is a 76% noncompliance rate. Had the USDA tested every horse on the premise, it is likely that the positive results would be even more damning.

([http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal\\_welfare/hp/downloads/show%20tally%202012%20for%20web.pdf](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_welfare/hp/downloads/show%20tally%202012%20for%20web.pdf))

Celebration management announced to the public in news releases leading up to the 2012 event that it would be swabbing every horse on the grounds for the presence prohibited foreign substances. They reported only 2 positive swab samples. To emphasize: the USDA found 145 positives in a random sample of 190 horses, while the industry program found 2 positives although every one of the over 2000 horses entered was supposedly swabbed and tested, according to its own news release.

Based on examples such as this one, it is our conclusion that overall the current HIO system is duplicitous or at best broken, or else there would not be such a large discrepancy between the USDA samples and those of the Celebration or its Horse Industry Organization inspection program, known as SHOW.

2. During 2010, 2011 and half of 2012, the violation rate for three HIOs with a strong record of compliance with the HPA, FOSH, International Walking Horse Association, and National Walking Horse Association employing rigorous inspections and tough penalties was .02% or only 8 violations out of 42,648 inspections. These three compliant HIOs have perfect inspection records when their shows are attended and audited by the USDA. By contrast, the violation rate at the 2012 Tennessee Walking Horse Celebration, inspected by the noncompliant HIO SHOW, was 9%. (166 horses out of 1849) The violation rate at the 2012 Celebration was 450 times greater than that of the compliant HIOs. Once again, the current HIO system is broken or else the Celebration HPA violation rate would not be 450 times greater than that of compliant HIOs.

3. In August, the USDA released figures for the 2013 show season through April 2013 that further support passage of PAST. Of 241 reported HPA violations, 225 – all but 16 - were on padded horses which is 93% of all violations. And, finally, over 80% of all the violations were reported when the USDA was present. When the USDA inspectors were present this year the HPA violation rate was 280% greater than when the rate at shows at which USDA was not present. This does not take into account the fact that many exhibitors leave when the USDA appears rather than face thorough, diligent inspections. If their horses had been inspected at shows with a USDA presence, the disparity in violation rates would have been even higher.

4. It is the conclusion also of FOSH that weak penalties imposed by noncompliant HIOs are meaningless and do not serve as deterrents.

As an example, the top five 2013 Rider's Cup contenders share 94 reported HPA violations as reported at [www.hpadata.us](http://www.hpadata.us).

<b>Trainer</b>	<b>Reported Career Violations (includes close family members)</b>
Groover	20
Green	20
McConnell	14
Wright	16
Derickson	24
Total	94

Another factor influencing FOSH's support of stronger penalties is the "Repeat Violator" list generated by the publicly available FOSH HPA Violations database. The repeat violator list is 264 pages long, single spaced. Much stronger penalties are needed to serve as a deterrent as the current penalty structure has caused for some a mere inconvenience but been essentially meaningless and ignored by violators for many years.

While FOSH has been a part of efforts to save the Tennessee Walking, Racking and Spotted Saddle industries by providing a network of horse shows where competitors train horses humanely and play fairly and in compliance with the law, we have noticed that the stigma associated with the problems inherent in the big lick industry has caused great economic harm to our breeds. Because most true horsemen do not want to be associated in any way with animal abuse or illegal activity, fewer horses are being bred, raised, trained, shod, boarded, fed, treated with veterinary care, and shown in our breeds. The negative impact on the economy caused by the ongoing presence of soring and the failure of the HPA to eradicate the problem is far-reaching. The PAST Act is needed to fix the deficiencies in the current law, restore honor to the breeds afflicted by soring, and bring more people and dollars back into the horse industry.

In closing, FOSH reiterates that its experience, analysis and research have led it to strongly support PAST which provides for greater penalties, abolishment of the HIO system and elimination of devices that are an integral part of the soring process.