

Statement by Chris McCarron

Energy & Commerce Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
Re: H.R.1754 – The Horseracing Integrity Act of 2019
January 28, 2020

Chair Schakowsky, Ranking Member McMorris Rogers, and Members of the Committee, my name is Chris McCarron. I was a professional Thoroughbred jockey for 28 years, from 1974 through 2002. I won 7,141 races, and when I retired, I was the leading money earner in the sport's history. I won six Triple Crown races and nine Breeders' Cup races, five in the Classic. I was inducted into the National Racing Hall of Fame in 1989 during my first year of eligibility. I am also a founding member of the Humane Society of the United States National Horseracing Advisory Council. I joined that council because I believe in the organization's animal welfare mission. The humane movement in American history was built around the protection of horses, and we have a deep responsibility to them. That's why I'm here today.

I support H.R. 1754 because horseracing, as a sport, has been in a serious decline for years and something must be done to curb this trend. I believe one of the reasons for this decline is the lack of public confidence in our product. Over the past few decades, medication violations (I mean by this, horses testing positive for banned substances and for non-banned substances in excess of permitted amounts) have escalated to the point of being unacceptable to our patrons and participants alike.

When I began my career in Maryland in 1974, the average number of *annual* starts was approximately 14. Today the average number of *career* starts is 11. This statistic alone has caused many of our horse owners to leave the sport and countless others to lose interest in becoming an owner. Racing simply cannot withstand this serious decline. Why would anyone, knowing these stats, want to become involved in racehorse ownership?

Further, there are far too many horses becoming injured to the point where their careers come to an early end. To borrow and adapt an old adage, "medications don't kill horses, improper use of medications kill horses," i.e., racing horses that would be better served by much-needed rest. Instead of giving the animal the rest it needs, a trainer relies on his/her veterinarian to administer a medication to mask pain by reducing inflammation caused by an injury. I can tell you this for sure. Horses' careers would last much longer if this practice was less prevalent.

I should also say this, that I have a personal interest in seeing this bill passed. Far too many of my brethren, the active jockeys and exercise riders plying their trade on a daily basis, are being injured due to horses breaking down during racing or training. Several years ago, the *Journal of American Medical Association* conducted a study that revealed

that jockeys experience 35 accidents per week. To be clear, this is a very dangerous occupation. More to the point, on average, two jockeys die each year due to training or racing accidents and two more are left paralyzed. The vast majority of these tragedies occur due to a horse's breaking down. Very often these horses are racing with pre-existing conditions that have been masked by medication.

I can also tell you this. While riding, there is no more of a helpless feeling, Madam Chair, than when a horse breaks down. If a jockey is lucky enough to survive the fall, the sorrow felt for the fate of the horse is the next weight to bear. When jockeys get on the horses, they aren't told the medical history, they aren't told whether the horses are completely sound, they aren't told whether particular horses should be resting rather than racing.

That is why I strongly support the Horseracing Integrity Act. This bill directly addresses one of the leading causes of breakdowns. Right now, there are almost no controls on what therapeutics horses are given while in training. A majority of breakdowns happen on the training track in the mornings. This bill will significantly expand out-of-competition testing, which is below 5% of all tests for horses right now. By comparison, 60% of all tests for Olympic athletes are out of competition.

There's something really wrong here and I'll tell you what it is. The status quo with 38 different states governing one industry with 38 different sets of rules and penalties and numerous different laboratories doing the testing using different standards is just not working. It simply cannot go on if Thoroughbred racing is to continue to be a viable industry.

I'm sure you are aware of the hundreds of thousands of jobs and the billions of dollars of revenue our industry provides. That concerns me too. Something must be done to stem the tide and stabilize an industry that is so vital to communities all over our country.

I sincerely hope you give H.R.1754 the thumbs-up and help the Thoroughbred racing industry right this ship. It's sinking and we truly need your help.