



May 26, 2022

Representative Janice D. Schakowsky
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2367 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Gus M. Bilirakis
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2354 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Schakowsky and Ranking Member Bilirakis, and Committee and Subcommittee members,

On behalf of our more than 9,300 members in the field of equine veterinary medicine, I am writing to express our strong support for the passage of **H.R. 5441**, the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act of 2021 also known as the “PAST Act of 2021.”

Broad support in Congress and in horse industry, veterinary, and other groups

The PAST Act has broad bipartisan support. It has tremendous public support, with endorsements by hundreds of groups and key individuals including:

- the American Horse Council and 67 other national and state horse breed and show organizations,
- the American Veterinary Medical Association, American Association of Equine Practitioners, and state veterinary groups in all 50 states,
- key individuals in the Tennessee Walking Horse show world,
- the National Sheriffs’ Association, Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, and major newspapers in Kentucky and Tennessee (the states where soring is most concentrated).

What PAST will do

The PAST Act simply amends existing federal law – the Horse Protection Act of 1970 – to better crack down on the cruel practice of “soring,” in which unscrupulous trainers deliberately inflict pain on the hooves and legs of Tennessee Walking Horses and certain other breeds to force them to perform an unnaturally high-stepping gait known as the “Big Lick” and 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. Soring methods include applying caustic chemicals, then wrapping tight bandages to “cook” those chemicals deep into the horse’s flesh for days, attaching heavy chains to strike against the sore legs and heavy, stacked horseshoes that force the horse’s legs into an unnatural angle, jamming hard objects into sensitive areas of the feet, cutting the hooves down to expose the live tissue, and using painful salicylic acid to slough off scarred tissue or numbing agents in an attempt to disguise the sore areas. The horses are also subjected to “stewarding” – in which trainers shock them in the face, kick them, and hit them with heavy wooden sticks to get them to stand still despite the pain and learn not to flinch when an inspector presses their sore legs.

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, according to a 2010 audit by the USDA Inspector General that recommended reforms incorporated in the PAST Act. The PAST Act will end the failed industry self-policing system, ban the use of devices associated with soring, strengthen penalties, and make illegal the actual soring of a horse, as well as directing another to do so. This legislation is carefully crafted to fix problems in the existing program but not overreach. It imposes no mandate on horse show management – they will still have the option to hire inspectors or not, with the continued incentive that if they do, they’ll be shielded from personal liability if soring is detected on their premises. The key difference is that under the PAST Act, those inspectors will be legitimate – licensed and assigned by USDA – rather than “in cahoots” with show management and encouraged to turn a blind eye to soring, as too often occurs now.

No additional taxpayer burden

This bill will not increase the deficit. The PAST Act will simply enable USDA to redirect its enforcement efforts and resources in a more efficient and effective way.

Who opposes PAST?

The only ones opposing this non-controversial legislation are those who are already breaking federal law, committing heinous cruelty, cheating to win unfair advantage at horse shows, and profiting from it, and their handful of defenders in Congress. This subset of the show horse world doesn’t want Congress to alter the status quo. (It’s like dog fighters coming to Congress and saying, “don’t do anything to make the federal law any tougher – we want to keep getting away with dogfighting and not have anyone get in our way!”) Many others in the show horse world are strongly advocating the PAST Act to deal with morally repugnant behavior that is giving their industry a major black eye, pulling down attendance at shows, costing them corporate and charitable sponsorships, and driving down their breed registry and prices for their horses.

The AAEP has long supported this much needed legislation to help combat the cruel practice of horse soring and encourage members of the committee to do so as well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Emma Read". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Emma Read, DVM, MVSc, DACVS,
President 2022
American Association of Equine Practitioners