



U.S. Trotting Association

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May 26, 2022

The Honorable Jan Schakowsky
Chairwoman
Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Consumer Protection & Commerce
United States House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis
Ranking Member
Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Consumer Protection & Commerce
United States House of Representatives
2322 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Schakowsky and Ranking Member Bilirakis:

On behalf of the U.S. Trotting Association (USTA) and our members, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to submit this important information for the record to the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Consumer Protection & Commerce for consideration at your May 26, 2022, hearing on H.R. 3355, the "Save America's Forgotten Equines Act of 2021" or the "SAFE Act of 2021." The USTA wholeheartedly supports the SAFE Act of 2021 and urges swift consideration and passage of this important legislation.

Since being founded in 1939, the USTA's mission has been to ensure the highest standards of safety and care for Standardbred horses and to promote and protect the harness racing industry. With nearly 17,000 members, the USTA serves a broad constituency, including Standardbred owners, breeders, drivers, trainers, racetracks, regulators, media, and racing fans.

The USTA strongly supports ending the legal pipeline of U.S. horses being transported outside of the U.S. for slaughter and human consumption. Horse slaughter within the U.S. is currently prohibited because Congress has not appropriated funding for U.S. Department of Agriculture inspectors to regulate the industry; therefore, transporting horses outside the U.S. for slaughter creates a loophole. In recent years, this loophole has enabled bad actors, known as "kill buyers," to take advantage of horses and horse owners in vulnerable situations. The kill buyers legally purchase retired horses and contact their previous owners (USTA members) to say they must either pay to buy the horse back or it will be transported to Canada or Mexico for slaughter. This illicit ransom economy is not only wrong, but it also provides kill buyers with more revenue to continue the practice and ultimately puts horses at lethal risk.

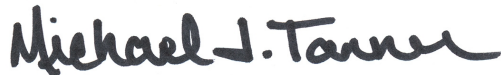
Horse owners, breeders, and the like should not have to fear selling or donating their horse might mean unintentionally placing them in the horsemeat pipeline. Likewise, potential horse buyers looking to provide for the long-term care of the horse should only be competing against others with a similar goal. Unlike buyers for the horsemeat market, these individuals, businesses, and organizations must consider the long-term costs of caring for the horse when allocating capital toward the purchase price, putting them at an inherent disadvantage to the so-called “kill buyers,” who do not face these costs. Closing this loophole will allow for the better protection of horses by those looking to provide them with care.

Additionally, the existence of this loophole stymies programs and organizations working to provide more suitable rehoming options for care. For example, the USTA leads and supports programs for retired Standardbred racehorses, including programs that provide safety nets for horses in need of care. These programs include the Support Our Standardbreds program, the Full Circle program, and an organization founded by USTA, the Standardbred Transition Alliance. The USTA would much rather see a Standardbred racehorse finish its racing days and serve as a pleasure horse or police force horse than end up on a truck bound for the boarder for slaughter. Our programs noted above help provide options for owners.

The USTA is proud to be a part of the “Final Stretch Alliance to End Horse Slaughter,” an innovative effort by equine industry and animal welfare organizations to enact a ban on horse slaughter. Collectively, we call on Congress to act quickly to pass the SAFE Act of 2021.

Sincerely,

The U.S. Trotting Association

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael J. Tanner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael J. Tanner
Executive Vice President and CEO