

# Animal Wellness Says Puerto Rico Legislature Has Zero Authority to Authorize Cockfighting

*Groups Urge the United States to Shut Down the Fighting Pits, Including Ones Planning to Operate Tomorrow Night*

SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO , USA ,  
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EINPresswire.com/ -- Animal Wellness Action (AWA) and the Animal Wellness Foundation (AWF) denounced the political posturing of Puerto Rico's Governor Wanda Vázquez and state legislators in passing a bill to authorize [cockfighting](#). The action happened on the eve of the effective date of the federal law banning cockfighting and dogfighting everywhere in the United States, including in Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories.



Cockfighting Ring

The bill also comes less than two months after U.S. District Court Judge Gustavo A. Gelpi rejected claims by Club Gallístico and other cockfighters in Puerto Rico challenging the 2018 amendment to the Animal Welfare Act that removed any ambiguity in the law about the application of animal fighting ban in the territories. Judge Gelpi granted the federal government's motion for summary judgment, declaring that "[n]either the Commonwealth's political status, nor the Territorial Clause, impede the United States Government from enacting laws that apply to all citizens of this Nation alike, whether as a state or territory." The case came before the U.S. District Court in Puerto Rico, and by a judge of Puerto Rican heritage and residency.

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The federal government has spoken without any ambiguity on this issue, and the federal courts have upheld its authority to stop cockfighting in the territories and elsewhere.”

*Drew Edmondson, former Oklahoma Attorney General*

The U.S. Department of Justice announced its support for the ban in this legal proceeding. “Just as courts have unanimously affirmed the ability of the federal government to restrict animal fighting in the fifty states, so too may it do so with respect to the territories,” wrote the

Department of Justice attorneys.

“The ‘legislative’ action by the Commonwealth’s politicians is an empty shell, but their action is having the effect of abetting criminal activity,” said Wayne Pacelle, founder of Animal Wellness Action. “The only route for the cockfighters and their political allies is through the federal judicial system, not the Commonwealth’s legislature in San Juan. Starting tomorrow, cockfighting is a felony and the law should be obeyed, regardless of this misdirection by politicians.”

“The legislature’s action amounts to political grandstanding at its worst,” said Ana María Hernández Martí, an Animal Law attorney based in San Juan. “The territory, including the

cockfighters and the politicians, had a year to sort this out, and then on the eve of the effective date of the law, they pull this stunt. Puerto Ricans should be upset by that lawmakers are giving the signal to cockfighters that they can break the law."

Under the federal anti-animal fighting law, it is a crime to:

- Knowingly sponsor or exhibit in an animal fighting venture;
- Knowingly attend an animal fighting venture, or knowingly cause an individual who has not attained the age of 16 to attend an animal fighting venture;
- Knowingly buy, sell, possess, train, transport, deliver, or receive any animal for purposes of having the animal participate in an animal fighting venture;
- Knowingly use the mail service of the U.S. Postal Service, or any "written, wire, radio televisions or other form of communications in, or use a facility of, interstate commerce," to advertise an animal for use in an animal fighting venture, or to advertise a knife, gaff, or other sharp instrument designed to be attached to the leg of a bird for use in an animal fighting venture, or to promote or in any other manner further an animal fighting venture except as performed outside the U.S.;
- Knowingly sell, buy, transport, or deliver in interstate or foreign commerce "a knife, a gaff, or any other sharp instrument" designed or intended to be attached to the leg of a bird for use in an animal fighting venture.

"The federal government has spoken without any ambiguity on this issue, and the federal courts have upheld its authority to stop cockfighting in the territories and elsewhere," said Drew Edmondson, former Attorney General of Oklahoma, the top law enforcement official in the state who saw cockfighting banned halfway through his 16-year tenure and fought off all sorts of wild maneuverings by the cockfighters to keep their blood sport alive. "A state or territory cannot authorize kidnapping or plural marriage if the federal government has forbidden these activities. It cannot do so with cockfighting either."

The AWA and AWF announced a rewards program to run for an indefinite time that provides a \$2,500 reward for any individual who provides critical information that results in a successful federal prosecution of an individual or set of individuals who violate the federal law against



Cockfighting Match



Jennifer Gonzalez  
@RepJennifer

Discussing the therapeutic benefits of cockfighting for Vietnam and Iraq war veterans in #PuertoRico.



Puerto Rico in Congress and 7 others

Tweet from Puerto Rico Delegate

animal fighting (7 U.S.C. § 2156). Animal Wellness has already received hundreds of tips from citizens concerned about illegal cockfighting and all these tips are being processed. Citizens can send tips and other information to us at [animalcrueltytips@animalwellnessaction.org](mailto:animalcrueltytips@animalwellnessaction.org). The reward program is also mentioned on [www.endcockfighting.org](http://www.endcockfighting.org), which serves as a comprehensive resource about the issue and call citizens to action to help.

Animal Wellness notes that the claims of the economic impact of cockfighting are wildly exaggerated. The 2012 Puerto Rico Census of Agriculture (COA) – the last available document on the website and available to the public -- reports 324 “cockfighting farms” reporting 6,667 fighting cocks and sales of \$1,187,102. It is already illegal under federal law for any birds to be shipped into or out of Puerto Rico for fighting purposes, and that would be the main way money is generated.

Puerto Rico’s Jennifer Gonzalez Colon, the Commonwealth’s Delegate to Congress, introduced two bills, H.R. 1189 and H.R. 5436, to repeal the animal fighting ban, but it has attracted not a single supporter from House or Senate lawmakers, except the Delegates from the other territories.

The Animal Wellness Foundation (Foundation) is a Los Angeles-based private charitable organization with a mission of helping animals by making veterinary care available to everyone with a pet, regardless of economic ability. We organize rescue efforts and medical services for dogs and cats in need and help homeless pets find a loving caregiver. We are advocates for getting veterinarians to the front lines of the animal welfare movement; promoting responsible pet ownership; and vaccinating animals against infectious diseases such as distemper. We also support policies that prevent animal cruelty and that alleviate suffering. We believe helping animals helps us all.

Animal Wellness Action (Action) is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) organization with a mission of helping animals by promoting legal standards forbidding cruelty. We champion causes that alleviate the suffering of companion animals, farm animals, and wildlife. We advocate for policies to stop dogfighting and cockfighting and other forms of malicious cruelty and to confront factory farming and other systemic forms of animal exploitation. To prevent cruelty, we promote enacting good public policies and we work to enforce those policies. To enact good laws, we must elect good lawmakers, and that’s why we remind voters which candidates care about our issues and which ones don’t. We believe helping animals helps us all.

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