

# U.S. House Committee Calls for Stepped Up Enforcement of Animal Cruelty Laws

WASHINGTON, DC, USA, July 13, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Today Animal Wellness Action (AWA) and Animal Wellness Foundation (AWF) applauded the U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies (CJS), led by Chairman Jose Serrano, D-N.Y. and Ranking Member Robert Aderholt, R-Ala., for urging the Department of Justice (DOJ) to enhance its work to prosecute federal animal cruelty crimes, including animal fighting, in its Fiscal Year 2021 spending bill. The Committee included language directing DOJ to make it a priority to enforce



Cockfighting that runs rampant in the U.S. | Photo: Shutterstock

violations federal animal welfare laws and strongly encouraged DOJ to create a dedicated section to enforce these laws. Reps. Charlie Crist, D-Fla., Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., Joe Neguse, D-Colo., and Mark Pocan, D-Wis. have been particularly active on the issue and championed the push for action along with 50 additional Members of the House that requested the language.

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*Holly Gann, director of federal affairs*

The Committee report notes that the Congress has enacted federal anti-cruelty statutes, including a law against all animal fighting, and says that “DOJ shall make it a priority to investigate and prosecute violations of animal welfare laws and is strongly encouraged to create a dedicated section within the Environment and Natural

Resources Division to enforce such laws.”

AWA and AWF and their National Law Enforcement Council urge the Senate to include bill language in its version of the take action on its version of the CJS spending bill and direct that the DOJ create an Animal Cruelty Crimes section, to allow for dedicated personnel to crack down on malicious cruelty.

“Enforcing laws against animal cruelty is as crucial as enacting them in the first place,” said Holly Gann, director of federal affairs at Animal Wellness Action and the Animal Wellness Foundation. “Aggressive enforcement of animal welfare laws is needed to put a stop to widespread animal fighting and other forms of animal cruelty. We commend the subcommittee for recognizing the importance of addressing this criminal activity.”

Despite being the most widely and severely criminalized form of animal cruelty, animal fighting remains a widespread criminal enterprise in the U.S. Animals are often drugged to heighten their aggression and forced to keep fighting even after they’ve suffered grievous injuries such as broken bones, deep gashes, punctured lungs, and pierced eyes. In cockfighting, birds have metal weapons, such as knives, attached to their legs where they slash each other to pieces and suffer slow, painful deaths. Animals used for fighting are at risk even when they are not in a fighting pit. They are typically chained outside, exposed to the weather, and denied veterinary care and basic humane treatment. Those who lose a match are subject to extreme cruelty, such as electrocution, beatings, or even killed. Animal fighting activities also typically go hand-in-hand with drug trafficking, gang violence, and other human violence.

AWA and AWF have conducted a series of investigations in Alabama, Guam, Oklahoma, and Tennessee revealing the illegal transport of tens of thousands of fighting birds to far-flung destinations, including Guam, Mexico, and the Philippines.

The Appropriations Committee’s actions are consistent with other actions taken by Congress. Last year, Congress directed the DOJ to make enforcement of the federal animal welfare laws a priority in its FY20 spending bill. Congress has also upgraded the federal animal fighting law five



Holly Gann, director of federal affairs at the Animal Wellness Foundation



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times in the last two decades, including in the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018. That bill included an amendment to clarify that the federal anti-animal fighting laws apply to every part of the United States, including the U.S. Territories, and took effect at the end of last year.

Federal law makes it a crime to sponsor or exhibit an animal in a fighting venture; to buy, sell, deliver, possess, train or transport an animal for fighting purposes; to use the U.S. mail to promote fighting; to bring a minor to an animal fight; or to be a spectator at an animal fighting spectacle. In addition to the federal animal fighting law, DOJ is also responsible for prosecuting a number of other animal welfare laws, including criminal violations of the Animal Welfare Act and the Horse Protection Act.

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.

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.

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