

# Puerto Rico's Leaders, including Governor Pedro Pierluisi, Should Stop Undermining Federal Law Against Animal Cruelty

*Puerto Rico must recognize the authority of the Congress and the courts when it comes to animal cruelty, specifically the barbaric practice of cockfighting.*

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, April 14, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Puerto Rico must recognize the authority of the Congress and the federal courts when it comes to animal cruelty, specifically the barbaric practice of cockfighting, argued [Animal Wellness Action](#) in the wake of a vitally important hearing before the U.S.

House Natural Resources Committee relating to the idea of Puerto Rico becoming a state – a policy idea predicated on the notion that 3.3 million citizens there should have full voting and economic rights. The Committee heard testimony related to H.R. 1522, the Puerto Rico Statehood Admission Act, and H.R. 2070, the Puerto Rick Self-Determination Act of 2021.



Cockfighting Ring

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*Wayne Pacelle*

No matter how the statehood debate is resolved, it is important not to obscure the jurisdiction's existing legal relationship to the United States: it is a territory, deriving a range of benefits from its territorial status and obligating it to a range of responsibilities and rules codified by the federal government.

In January, soon after taking office, Governor Pedro

Pierluisi expressed support for the continuation of cockfighting on the island, even though the matter had just been adjudicated by the federal courts in favor of the national ban on animal fighting. Pierluisi stated that he is “committed to supporting an industry that generates jobs and income for our economy, that represents our culture and our history.” He declared that he and

Jennifer Gonzalez Colon, Puerto Rico's Resident Commissioner in Congress, "will continue to fight for them." He and his predecessor, Wanda Vázquez Garced, have said, without legal authority, that cockfighting may continue so long as animals are not imported for the purpose.

"It is not the Commonwealth's prerogative to opt-out of this U.S. law," said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action. "Whether Puerto Rico is a state or a territory, the outcome when it comes to cockfighting is the same: it is illegal and it must stop. Elected officials have a moral and legal duty to promote adherence to the law."

The federal law against dogfighting and cockfighting never singled out Puerto Rico, Guam, or any other U.S. territory. The federal law, step by step, applied prohibitions to cockfighting in the territories, and finally, in 2018, Congress finished the job in banning the practice on every acre of U.S. soil.

"No jurisdiction within the U.S. should be an enclave or refuge for this kind of intentional cruelty," said Ana Maria Hernandez Marti, an animal law attorney based in San Juan. "Staged fights pit animals against each other for-profit, gambling, and entertainment. The animals are often drugged to heighten their aggression and are forced to keep fighting even after suffering broken bones, deep gashes, punctured lungs, and pierced eyes."

Animal Wellness Action notes that the presence of an above-ground cockfighting industry anywhere undermines prohibitions elsewhere. Territorial disregard for the federal anti-cockfighting law gives animal fighters an unwarranted patina of legitimacy, a market for fighting animals and paraphernalia, and venues for the conduct.

The federal courts have rejected legal pleadings filed by the cockfighting community in Puerto Rico. "Neither 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," wrote Judge Gustavo Gelpí in siding with the United States in an October 2019 ruling brought by Club Gallístico and other fight venue operators challenged the newest provisions of the anti-fighting law. And earlier this year, Federal Appeals Court Judge Sandra L. Lynch, on behalf of a panel for the court, wrote that the U.S. law against cockfighting "is a valid exercise of Congress's Commerce Clause power and does not violate plaintiffs' individual rights."

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 Center for a Humane Economy (“the Center”) is a non-profit organization that focuses on influencing the conduct of corporations to forge a humane economic order. The first organization of its kind in the animal protection movement, the Center encourages businesses to honor their social responsibilities in a culture where consumers, investors, and other key stakeholders abhor cruelty and the degradation of the environment and embrace innovation as a means of eliminating both.

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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