

# Animal groups highlight scofflaw participation at walking horse event and renew call for federal reforms

WASHINGTON, DC, U.S., September 1, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Humane Society Legislative Fund and the Humane Society of the United States have written to the United States Department of Agriculture about flagrant violations and flouting of the Horse Protection Act at the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration, the annual multi-day pinnacle event for a faction of the horse show world that applauds and rewards the artificial, pain-based high-stepping gait known as the "Big Lick."

This year, a horse named Joe Pa, a top contender for the title of World Grand Champion, and other horses are being trained and shown by the stable owned by an individual currently serving a five-year federal disqualification for no less than 27 alleged violations of the Horse Protection Act. During that disqualification period, Herbert Derickson is not supposed to be involved in any way in the showing of horses, directly or indirectly.

Horses advertised as being trained by Derickson's stable are being ridden and/or exhibited at the Celebration by a different person, Winky Groover, who previously served his own federal disqualification stemming from alleged Horse Protection Act violations.

The Horse Protection Act was enacted in 1970 to end the cruel practice of horse "soring," in which trainers intentionally subject Tennessee walking horses and related breeds to pain through the use of caustic chemicals, weighted shoes, chains, cutting and other gruesome techniques to force them to perform an exaggerated high-stepping gait that wins prizes at some shows.

The Humane Society Legislative Fund and Humane Society of the United States issued a letter asking the USDA for a determination of whether the arrangement involving Derickson and Groover is a violation of Derickson's disqualification and if so, urges that Joe Pa and any other horses trained by 4 The Glory Farm be prohibited from showing at the Celebration and any other shows during his disqualification. The letter demands further that Derickson be cited and prosecuted for the violation.

The two organizations have called on President Joe Biden and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to swiftly reinstate and publish in the Federal Register a final rule to strengthen enforcement of the Horse Protection Act by eliminating the failed system of industry self-policing and use of

devices integral to soring. This rule was announced and posted on the United States Department of Agriculture's website in January 2017 during Secretary Vilsack's first tenure heading the agency, but due to delays at the Federal Register it was not published before the end of the Obama administration, giving the Trump administration time to withdraw it.

The HSUS and HSLF have sued over this withdrawal of the rule which they believe to have been unlawful. Bipartisan Senate and House of Representatives champions in the fight to end soring led [letters to Vilsack earlier this year](#) urging reinstatement of the rule, and [wrote to him again recently](#) urging full enforcement of the Horse Protection Act at this year's Celebration.

"There's an immediate cure for what plagues the Tennessee walking horse industry – authentic reform that does away with industry self-policing and the use of painful devices associated with soring," said Keith Dane, senior director on equine protection for the HSUS. "Whether by USDA action or passage of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, we can place this noble breed of horse on a more sound and humane footing and bring an end to the clandestine cruelty that goes on in the training barns without serious consequences for the perpetrators."

[The PAST Act passed](#) the House in 2019 by an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 333-96 (H.R. 693) and already has 49 cosponsors in the Senate (S. 2295). It mirrors key elements of the rule – to end industry self-policing and use of devices integral to soring – and also strengthens penalties.

#### About HSUS:

Founded in 1954, the Humane Society of the United States fights the big fights to end suffering for all animals. Together with millions of supporters, we take on puppy mills, factory farms, trophy hunts, animal testing and other cruel industries. With our affiliates, we rescue and care for tens of thousands of animals every year through our animal rescue team's work and other hands-on animal care services. We fight all forms of animal cruelty to achieve the vision behind our name: A humane society. Learn more about our work at [humanesociety.org](http://humanesociety.org). Subscribe to Kitty Block's blog, A Humane World. Follow the HSUS Media Relations department on Twitter. Read the award-winning All Animals magazine. Listen to the Humane Voices Podcast.

#### About HSLF:

Humane Society Legislative Fund works to pass animal protection laws at the state and federal level, to educate the public about animal protection issues and support humane candidates for office. Formed in 2004, HSLF is incorporated under section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code as a separate lobbying affiliate of the Humane Society of the United States. Visit us on the web at [hslf.org](http://hslf.org), read our blog at [hslf.org/blog](http://hslf.org/blog), and follow us on Facebook at [facebook.com/humanelegislation](https://facebook.com/humanelegislation) and on Twitter @HSLegFund.

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