

# House Lawmakers Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Crack Down on Rampant and Illegal Dogfighting and Cockfighting across U.S.

*Legislation also targets staged fights, fighters who are raising, shipping tens of thousands of animals to other nations*

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EINPresswire.com/ -- Noting the barbarism of staged dogfighting and disease threats to poultry posed by cockfighting, Reps. Cindy Axne, D-Iowa, and Don Bacon, R-Neb., introduced legislation to strengthen the federal law against animal fighting.

Reps. Mark Amodei, R-Nev., Troy Carter, D-La., Buddy Carter, R-Ga., Brian Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., Nancy Mace, R-S.C., Jim McGovern, D-Mass., and Mike Quigley, D-Ill., join them as original cosponsors of the legislation to crack down on staged combat between animals.



Pit Bulls are famously the victim of animal fighters who exploit their strength for combat.

“

Man’s best friend has absolutely no place in a fighting ring. We must end this brutal, barbaric practice for good and ensure that all animals are treated with respect and dignity.”

*Rep. Earl L. “Buddy” Carter, R-GA*

The proposed amendments to Section 26 of the Animal Welfare Act would fortify an already strong federal law and enhancement enforcement of the law by:

- banning simulcasting and gambling on animal fights in the United States, no matter where the fights and broadcasts originate;
- halting the shipment of mature roosters shipped through the U.S. mail;
- creating a citizen suit provision to allow private right of action against illegal animal fighters and ease the resource burden on federal agencies; and

- enhancing forfeiture provisions to include real property used in the commission of an animal fighting crime.

“Tens of thousands of cockfighters and dogfighters operate in the United States, gathering at hundreds of fighting pits and stadiums, placing the animals born and bred for combat in fighting pits, and then watching them kill each other so they can make wagers and revel in the bloodletting,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of [Animal Wellness Action](#). “Most people treat this as a settled moral issue, but animal fighting remains an animal-welfare crisis of epic proportions.”

“For too long, dogfighters and cockfighters have carried on their rampant abuses with too many enforcement loopholes and not enough tools to end the abuses,” said Rep. Cindy Axne, D-IA. “We must step up to defend these innocent animals and hold these abusers accountable, and these additions to the Animal Welfare Act will be critical in those efforts. As a lifelong animal rights activist, I will continue working to ensure animals are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.”

“Man’s best friend has absolutely no place in a fighting ring,” said Rep. Earl L. “Buddy” Carter, R-GA. “We must do whatever we can to end this brutal, barbaric practice for good and ensure that all animals are treated with respect and dignity.”

“Illegal cockfighting is cruel and hits close to home. Earlier this year right in our backyard in Ridgeville, 32 people were charged in an illegal cockfighting ring,” said Rep. Nancy Mace, R-SC. “We must continue to crack down on these criminals and ensure law enforcement has the tools they need to end this horrific practice.”

“Illegal gambling endangers consumers, robs communities of tax revenue, and in the case of wagering on animal fighting, tragically leads to the abuse of animals,” said Alex Costello, Vice President of Government Affairs at the American Gaming Association (AGA). “We must ensure law enforcement has the authority to go after these illegal operators, which is why the AGA is proud to support these key amendments to the Animal Welfare Act.”

These amendments protect public health and safeguard poultry suppliers from diseases such as avian influenza and virulent Newcastle disease. Cockfighting involves close handling and transport of birds, including those who become bloody and severely injured at fighting matches, making the likelihood of disease transmission from birds to people substantial.

While federal law enforcement would still drive enforcement actions against cockfighting, this legislation, by authorizing citizen suits, would provide new levers to initiate civil proceedings, drawing attention to the cockfighting operators openly conducting their barbaric and illegal activities. A separate bill, the Animal Cruelty Enforcement Act, would create an Animal Cruelty Crimes section at the Department of Justice and allow for more resources to coordinate and execute strategies against illegal animal fighting.

“Animal fighting is one of the most heinous forms of animal cruelty,” noted Leslie Rudloff, Esq., Chief Program & Policy Officer, Animal Protection New Mexico. “Despite laws to the contrary, animal fighting continues to occur across the country bringing with it other crimes like human trafficking, illegal gambling, and drugs.”

The Animal Fighting Amendments of 2022 would also address the growing international broadcasting and wagering on cockfighting, in an era when sports and other forms on-line gambling have emerged as multi-billion-dollar forms of wagering. Pitmasters LIVE (<https://pitmasterlive.com> and <https://wpcpitmasters.com>) are just two sites. Former Philippines president and strongman Rodrigo Duterte issued a ban on online betting at cockfights after dozens of people were kidnapped and never heard from again in the country. One woman, who had unpaid gambling debts, reportedly sold her child to pay off her debts. Yet the Philippines continues to stream cockfights with digital payment platforms. These sites are available to U.S. gamblers and while it is impossible to track the scale, it's clear it is surging in the United States.

Congress has strengthened the federal law against animal fighting five times since 2002, with a free-standing bill passed in 2007 and through Farm bill amendments in 2002, 2008, 2014, and 2018. You can see a legislative history here.

In recent years, Animal Wellness Action and the [Animal Wellness Foundation](#) have conducted comprehensive investigations of cockfighting in Alabama, California, Guam, Kentucky, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico, and Tennessee, and found fighting operations and trafficking of hundreds of thousands of animals for fighting across state, territorial, and national lines. While cockfighters stage illegal animal combat throughout the U.S. -- at dozens of arenas in Puerto Rico and at facilities from Alabama to California to Kentucky to Oklahoma -- America is also the cockfighting breeding supplier to the world, with countless fighting animals sent to Mexico, the Philippines, and other nations.

Cockfighters continue to ship tens of thousands of birds through the U.S. mails every year, along with foreign shipments by other delivery services. Data from the Guam Department of Agriculture (GDA) reveal a total of 2,138 fighting animals were transported to Guam in 2021. Over the last five years, Animal Wellness Action has documented 11,516 fighting birds entering the island through import permits granted by the GDA.

Showing Animals Respect & Kindness (SHARK) has also conducted extensive field investigations of illegal animal fighting operations.

“Animal fighting is an epidemic in this nation, and we are excited that this bill will give SHARK and law enforcement more tools to put people in federal prison who commit these atrocious actions toward animals,” added Steve Hindi, founder of SHARK. Mr. Hindi was assaulted by Ohio cockfighters some months ago and landed in the hospital.

“My work in Alabama shows that animal fighting is widespread there, partly because the state law provides a maximum penalty of \$50 for illegal cockfighting,” adds Marty Irby, executive director of Animal Wellness Action. “This makes it all the more important to have a potent federal law to shut down these organized criminal associations.”

A series of federal courts have turned away all challenges to the application of the law in the U.S. territories and the states, affirming U.S. authority to crack down on these forms of cruelty.

Under Section 26 of the Animal Welfare Act, 7 U.S.C. 2156, it is a crime to:

- Knowingly sponsor or exhibit in an animal fighting venture;
- Knowingly attend an animal fighting venture, or knowingly causing 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 using 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.

Animal Wellness 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 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.

The [Center for a Humane Economy](#) 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.

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