

Pro-Cockfighting Bills Fail in Oklahoma Legislature

Second of two bills bill to decriminalize cockfighting dies today in state legislature, slashing threat of any weakening of the state's voter-approved law

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK, UNITED STATES, April 13, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The effort to unwind the state law making cockfighting a felony met with a final defeat today, with the Senate choosing not even to give a hearing to a bill, HB 2530, that would have allowed Oklahoma counties to opt out of the strong penalty provisions of the law approved by voters 21 years ago. A similar bill, SB 1006, by Sen. Lonnie Paxton, R-Tuttle, also died, more than two weeks ago in the Senate.



Cockfighting is brutal and a magnet for other criminal activity. Oklahomans can be happy these pro-cockfighting bills are dead.

A third bill, HB 1792, a broad rewrite of felonies on a wide range of subjects and which still does include a reduction in fines for cockfighting, dogfighting, and other forms of malicious cruelty, is still technically alive, but it is almost certainly not going to progress in its current form.

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“Oklahomans want cockfighting to be illegal, they want felony-level penalties for this cruelty, and they want the law actively enforced in every county,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of [Animal Wellness Action](#), which helped lead opposition to the legislation. “Decriminalizing cockfighting was a colossally unpopular and wrong-headed idea. We are grateful that lawmakers kicked this retrograde idea to the curb.”

According to records from the Oklahoma Ethics Commission, the Oklahoma Gamefowl

Commission raised \$71,000 for its political activities by the beginning of the year and made campaign donations to 34 candidates and sitting lawmakers in 2022, as a set-up for their failed 2023 legislative campaign.

According to a [Sooner Survey released in late March](#), 87 percent of Oklahoma favor a ban on cockfighting. "Even in the southeast (86%) and southwest (80%) we have uber-majorities wanting cockfighting to be illegal. In fact, in each of the five congressional districts in Oklahoma, at least 83% want cockfighting to be illegal and in no instance does support for legality exceed 12%," observed Pat McFerron, president of Cole Hargrave Snodgrass & Associates and architect of the Sooner Survey. The survey is the first independent poll to examine attitudes toward cockfighting in the state in years.

"As the session progressed, lawmakers understood that they were being lobbied by people systematically breaking the anti-cruelty laws of Oklahoma and the United States," said Thomas Pool, D.V.M., the senior veterinarian with Animal Wellness Action and a native of Comanche County in the southwest part of the state. "Business leaders, along with anyone else with an ounce of sense, understand that cockfighting is the very definition of barbarism and backwardness."

Dr. Pool, a retired colonel in the U.S. Army who ran the Veterinary Command for three branches of the U.S. military and who grew up on his family's 100-year-old ranch, said that even having this debate hurts Oklahoma's image.

Animal Wellness Action and Showing Animals Respect and Kindness ([SHARK](#)) conducted investigations revealing that the leaders of the Oklahoma Gamefowl Commission are involved in illegal cockfighting activities. "Our research, including our drone work, demonstrated beyond doubt that the people pushing decriminalization were knee deep in the sordid business of cockfighting," noted Steve Hindi, president of SHARK.

When voters approved a ban on cockfighting in Oklahoma in 2002, they did so by a wide margin. The same year, Congress banned any interstate or foreign movement of fighting animals. Since then, Congress has strengthened the federal law four more times, banning not only cockfighting but possession of fighting animals, sale of cockfighting implements, and any sale or movement of fighting birds.

"The problem is not that our anti-cruelty laws are too harsh," said Drew Edmondson, former Oklahoma Attorney General (1994-2010) and co-chair of the National Law Enforcement Council for Animal Wellness Action. "Rather it's that cockfighters are exhibiting knowing and reckless disregard for our laws, and some county sheriffs and district attorneys are failing to uphold the law without fear or favor." Edmondson was attorney general when Oklahoma approved State Question 687 and he defended the measure against cockfighters' attacks then to go to court and to try to suspend the law in the counties. In 2004, the Oklahoma Supreme Court unanimously ruled in 2004 that the vote of the people was a proper exercise of state authority.

Animal Wellness Action and SHARK will continue to forward detailed information to county, state, and federal law enforcement authorities about the substantial network of organized cockfighting criminals in the state.

ABOUT

Animal Wellness Action is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) whose mission is to help animals by promoting laws and regulations at federal, state, and local levels that forbid cruelty to all animals. The group also works to enforce existing anti-cruelty and wildlife protection laws. Animal Wellness Action believes helping animals helps us all.

Center for a Humane Economy is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(3) whose mission is to help animals by helping forge a more 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 Center believes helping animals helps us all.

SHARK is a non-profit organization with supporters around the U.S. and beyond. SHARK receives no government funding and completely relies on donations and grants to work on issues ranging in scope from local to worldwide. With a small core of volunteers, and a staff of five, SHARK battles tirelessly against rodeos, bullfighting, pigeon shoots, turkey shoots, canned hunts and more. President Steve Hindi has an open invitation to debate "the opposition." Because of his domination of past debates with animal abusers, however, it has been years since the opposition has taken him on.

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