

Senators Introduce FIGHT Act to Enhance Enforcement and Crack Down on Dogfighting, Cockfighting, and Associated Crimes

Mass shooting at known illegal cockfighting venue outside Honolulu demonstrates violence from animal-fighting enterprises spills into communities, harms people

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, May 10, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Driven by concerns for the barbarism of animal fighting, mass shooting and other crimes comingled with staged animal combat, as well as disease threats to poultry and other birds posed by illegal transports of fighting roosters, U.S. Sens. Cory Booker, D-N.J., and John Kennedy, R-La., introduced legislation to strengthen the federal law against dogfighting and cockfighting.



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

Their bill is the companion to H.R. 2742, introduced last month by U.S. Reps. Don Bacon, R-Neb., and Andrea Salinas, D-Ore. Their bipartisan, bicameral legislation is entitled the Fighting Inhumane Gambling and High-Risk Trafficking (FIGHT) Act.

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Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action

The FIGHT Act, amending [Section 26](#) of the Animal Welfare Act, would enhance enforcement opportunities by banning simulcasting of and gambling on animal fighting ventures; halting the shipment of mature roosters (chickens only) through the U.S. mail (shipping dogs by mail is already illegal); creating a private right of action against illegal animal fighters; and allowing for forfeiture of property assets used in animal fighting crimes.

“For thrills and gambling, dogfighters and cockfighters place animals in pits and goad them to injure, mutilate, and kill,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of [Animal Wellness Action](#) and the Center for a Humane Economy. “The FIGHT Act will provide more tools to law enforcement to root out this barbarism in the nation and prevent the spillover of violence and mayhem in our communities.”

In April, there was a mass shooting at a cockfight in Hawaii, with two people murdered and three injured. In Dallas, just weeks before, there was a shooting at a cockfight, with the perpetrator in possession of more than 2,000 gamecocks at a cockfighting complex he maintained.

"Animal fighting is cruel, illegal, and unacceptable," said Sen. Booker. "It's time we take stronger action to stop these heinous abuses against animals and protect them from being exploited for entertainment and profit. This bill will tighten enforcement to put a stop to illegal animal fighting."

“When it comes to dog and cock fights, these abusers are organized and dangerous — to people as well as innocent animals,” said Sen. Kennedy. “It’s illegal to hurt God’s creatures for sport, and our bill would give law enforcement more tools to end this widespread abuse.”

“When law enforcement officers bust dogfights or cockfights, we often find a cluster of other criminal behavior: illegal gambling, money laundering, tax evasion, narcotics trafficking, illegal weapons, and more,” noted Sheriff Mike Brown (ret.), president of the Small & Rural Law Enforcement Executives Association. “Stronger laws against animal fighting, with strong enforcement, will only make our communities safer.”

“Allowing wagering on animal fighting is another tragic example of illegal actors blatantly ignoring the law,” said Alex Costello, vice president of government affairs at the American Gaming Association (AGA). “We must empower law enforcement to go after nefarious illegal operators, which is why the AGA is proud to support these key amendments to the Animal Welfare Act.”

The amendments to the federal anti-animal-fighting law also will help 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. Virulent Newcastle disease has entered the United States through the illegal smuggling of infected cockfighting roosters from Mexico at least 10 times, causing the epidemic in southern California in 2002-03 and also a massive outbreak in 2018-20 which resulted in 16 million dead birds and \$1 billion in outlays from the federal government in containment costs.

“Animal movements by people are the most important risk factor for spread of domestic animal infectious diseases,” said Dr. Jim Keen, D.V.M., Ph.D., director of veterinary programs for the

Center for a Humane Economy and a former 20-year infectious disease specialist with the USDA. "If cockfighting birds are infected, they have the potential to expand the geography and duration of viral outbreaks throughout the U.S. and the world." Dr. Keen's 62-page page on cockfighting and avian diseases can be found [here](#).

The FIGHT Act also would address the growing international broadcasting and wagering on animal fighting, in an era where on-line gambling has exploded. Online gambling in the Philippines generates more than \$10 billion a year in wagers. That activity faced scrutiny after more than 30 gambling-related kidnappings last year where the victims were never found. One woman reportedly sold her child to pay off her related gambling debts. These sites are available throughout the world, including to U.S. gamblers, and while it is impossible to track the scale, it's clear they are surging in the United States.

In recent years, Animal Wellness Action, the Animal Wellness Foundation, the Center for a Humane Economy, and Showing Animals Respect and Kindness (SHARK) have conducted comprehensive investigations of cockfighting in Alabama, California, Guam, Kentucky, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico, Tennessee, and other states and territories. 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.

Data from the Guam Department of Agriculture (GDA) reveal a total of 2,138 fighting animals were transported to Guam in 2021 – all by U.S. mail. Over the last five years, Animal Wellness Action has documented 11,516 fighting birds entering the island through import permits granted by the GDA, and according to Thomas Pool, DVM, MPH, DACVPM, the former Territorial Veterinarian for Guam and now the senior veterinarian with Animal Wellness Action, "the birds were all shipped only for cockfighting and for no legitimate purposes." This legislation bars any use of the U.S. mail to ship adult roosters (chickens).

"Animal fighting is an epidemic in this nation, and I know it because SHARK is finding animal fighting pits all across the nation and exposing them" added Steve Hindi, founder of SHARK. "We must have more help from the federal government to shut down these criminal operations."

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 cause 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.

You can learn about the legislative history of animal fighting here. A fact sheet on the FIGHT Act is available here. Our new research paper on cockfighting and avian influenza and other infectious diseases can be found here. And you can read a summary here of the federal courts’ upholding all provisions of the animal-fighting law as constitutional.

ABOUT

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 and to encourage enforcement of our laws. We believe helping animals helps us all.

The Center for a Humane Economy is a non-profit organization that focuses on influencing businesses to pay attention to animal cruelty in their operations and to eliminate harmful practices. We believe helping animals helps us all.

The Animal Wellness Foundation is a non-profit organization that provides critical veterinary services to pet owners in need and it affiliated with two veterinary hospitals in Los Angeles.

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