

Latest Dogfighting-Related Tragedy Underscores Need for Congress to Pass the FIGHT ACT

Infant killed by fentanyl as parents ran dogfighting operations out of home, cops say.

CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA, USA, August 29, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Animal welfare groups renewed their urgent appeal to Congress to pass the FIGHT Act after news that the alleged operators of a dogfighting ring in South Carolina allowed their 10-month-old daughter to be killed by exposure to fentanyl, the highly addictive and frequently lethal opioid that has plagued the United States in recent years.



The FIGHT Act will give law enforcement more tools to squeeze dogfighters and cockfighters and end their cruelty.

First responders were called about an unresponsive infant in Ladson, S.C., in May. They found the baby laying on her stomach on a bed while her mother, 39-year-old Sara Constance Shakeri-Taylor, slept nearby. A toxicology test determined the cause of death was ingestion of a “large amount” of fentanyl. Police say the drug was found on the child’s baby bottle, formula, and a pacifier.

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While at the home, officials observed 15 pit bull-type dogs and items “widely known to be used for dog fighting,” according to a press release from the Charleston County’s

Sheriff’s Office. Law enforcement obtained a search warrant and subsequently leveled multiple charges against Shakeri-Taylor and the dead infant’s father, Sandy Gathers, including animal-cruelty ones related to dogfighting.

Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy, said he was saddened but not surprised.

“Every day, we hear of dogfighting and cockfighting operations tied to money laundering, mass shootings, and cartel-controlled narcotics operations,” he said. “But this incident of a baby dying because of derelict parents involved in a dogfighting ring is sickening to the core. We must stop this scourge of dogfighting and cockfighting in South Carolina and throughout the nation. No more delays and no more hedging on strong policies and robust enforcement.”

Pacelle said that cracking down on animal fighting of all kinds—including cockfighting—will lead to a reduction in other crimes as perpetrators are taken off the streets. That’s why Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy are advocating for passage of the Fighting Inhumane Gambling and High-Risk Trafficking (FIGHT) Act (H.R. 2742 and S. 1529). They say it is critical legislation that addresses a pervasive and deeply troubling issue: the rampant and barbaric practice of animal fighting, which is inextricably linked to a host of other serious crimes.

“Animal fighting is not just an issue of animal cruelty, it is a criminal enterprise that fuels a network of illicit activities,” said Scott Edwards, general counsel for the groups. “Those who engage in dogfighting and cockfighting are not simply animal abusers—they are criminals who often have ties to illegal drugs, human trafficking, illegal possession of firearms, and other violent crimes. Animal fighting is a public safety issue that affects so many communities.”

Moreover, cockfighting, an enduring American scourge, plays a significant role in exacerbating the American border crisis. U.S.-based cockfighters are deeply involved in a massive trade with Mexican cartels that control many major cockfighting venues south of the border. This illicit activity is creating a separate border crisis centered around animal trafficking, posing serious threats to both Americans and Mexicans.

Animal fighting is so severe that it has garnered the support of over 300 national, state, and local law enforcement agencies, including: • National Sheriffs' Association • National District Attorneys Association • Arizona Sheriffs' Association • Buckeye (Ohio) State Sheriffs' Association • Colorado District Attorneys Council • Idaho State Sheriffs' Association • Indiana Sheriffs' Association • Iowa Sheriffs' Association and Deputies' Association • Kansas Sheriffs' Association • Louisiana District Attorneys Association • Michigan Sheriffs' Association • Minnesota Sheriffs' Association • New York State Sheriffs' Association • Pennsylvania Sheriffs' Association • Tennessee Sheriffs' Association • Small and Rural Law Enforcement Executives Association

“The FIGHT Act will do so much to curb these kinds of crimes,” he said. “It would ban online gambling on animal fights, allow courts to seize fighting pits and other property used by convicted animal fighters in the commission of their crimes, stop the shipment of fighting roosters through the mail, and allow law-abiding citizens to protect their homes and families by

bringing civil suits against cockfighters and dogfighters when governmental authorities are too slow to act.”

U.S. Rep. Nancy Mace, R-1-S.C., is one of the co-leaders of the FIGHT Act. She is the only Member of the South Carolina Congressional delegation to cosponsor the legislation. A fact sheet on the FIGHT Act can be found [here](#).

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. X: @AWAction_News

The 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. X: @TheHumaneCenter

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