



Animal Welfare Institute

900 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20003
awionline.org phone: (202) 337-2332 fax: (202) 446-2131

September 21, 2022

Congressman Frank Pallone
Chair
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2322 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers:

On behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute, I am writing to express our strong support for H.R. 5441, the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act. We appreciate the House Energy and Commerce Committee marking up this sorely needed legislation, which enjoys tremendous bipartisan support and currently has 261 cosponsors in the House and 53 in the Senate. As you both know, the PAST Act was unanimously approved by the Energy and Commerce Consumer Protection & Commerce Subcommittee in June, so we hope that this priority horse protection bill can at last come to the floor of the House of Representatives for a vote and again, appreciate your leadership in advancing this measure.

The Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act (H.R. 5441)

The Horse Protection Act (HPA) was enacted in 1970 to end the abusive practice of soring. Soring methods include applying caustic chemicals on horses' legs, using plastic wrap and tight bandages to "cook" those chemicals deep into their flesh for days, attaching chains to strike against the sore legs, inserting hard objects such as screws and resins into tender areas of the hooves, paring the soles of the feet down to sensitive tissue, and using salicylic acid or other painful substances to slough off scarred tissue in an attempt to disguise the sored areas.

Unscrupulous trainers rely on soring to induce an exaggerated high-stepping gait for competition and shows. As USDA data and records show, soring remains a persistent and rampant problem among Tennessee Walking Horses and related breeds. A 2010 USDA Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigation underscored the failings of the current industry self-policing scheme and the lengths to which trainers go to evade detection. The OIG audit recommended eliminating the flawed system of industry self-policing. Unfortunately, little has changed with HPA enforcement, and in 2021, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine released a report urging the USDA to discontinue its reliance on industry inspectors, and instead depend on veterinarians to inspect horses for soreness.

The PAST Act enjoys virtually unparalleled levels of support in Congress and among animal protection, horse industry, and veterinary groups. The American Horse Council, the American Association of Equine Practitioners, and the American Veterinary Medication Association all endorse the bill. After securing well over 290 cosponsors in the 116th Congress (308 by the end of the session), the PAST Act moved directly to the floor per House rules where it overwhelmingly passed by a vote of 333-96.

It is disappointing that over fifty years have gone by without a significant upgrade to the HPA. Meanwhile, horses continue to suffer from the extreme and grotesque abuses associated with soring. A 2017 attempt by USDA to finalize a rulemaking that mirrored many of the PAST Act's core components was promptly frozen by the prior administration. An urgent need exists for Congress to address this ongoing problem. By strengthening penalties, ensuring that USDA licensed and trained inspectors are enforcing the HPA, making the actual act of soring illegal, and prohibiting the use of specific devices implicated in soring, the PAST Act would implement much needed reforms to protect horses from abuse.

The Animal Welfare Institute greatly appreciates the Energy and Commerce Committee's attention to this critical equine welfare priority. Ending the cruelty linked to horse soring has never been closer given the remarkably strong support among Members of Congress for passing the PAST Act. We respectfully ask that you advance this bill out of Committee today and work with House leadership to bring H.R. 5441 to the floor as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Joanna Grossman, PhD
Equine Program Manager and Senior Advisor
Animal Welfare Institute
900 Pennsylvania Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20003
202-446-2143
joanna@awionline.org