

Caring Puerto Ricans Reporting Illegal Cockfighting

Federal Law Is Brazenly Defied, Even by Politicians Rightly Plead for Federal Disaster Relief

WASHINGTON, DC, USA, February 12, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Dozens of citizens of Puerto Rico are writing to Animal Wellness Action (AWA) to alert the organization to illegal cockfighting activities on the island, signaling their own opposition to the bloody spectacles and reminding the nation that cockfighters are disrespecting the rule of law and perpetrating acts of animal cruelty. The tips have come in response to the release of an AWA rewards program providing up to \$2,500 to individuals who provide information that leads to the arrest and conviction of people violating our federal animal fighting laws.

At least 25 venues at which fighting has or is occurring have been identified, at least 15 of which continue to operate on a regular basis, based on information received from tipsters. The number of operating pits is probably larger, and we urge the citizens of Puerto Rico to be our eyes and ears and call out animal cruelty when they see it. Venue operators continue to promote these illegal activities with physical posters and social media posts. (Animal Wellness Action has posted copies of some of these promotional materials here.)

“So many Puerto Ricans don’t support cockfighting, and that’s why they’re sharing details about illegal cockfighting,” said Ana Maria Hernández Martí, an Animal Law attorney based in San Juan. “It’s a political myth that the people of Puerto Rico think the federal law against animal fighting is an imposition on our country. Staged animal



Cockfighting Match



Wayne Pacelle

fighting is not representative of Puerto Rico, it does not reflect our values, nor our culture.”

Last month, Animal Wellness Action (AWA) and the Animal Wellness Foundation (AWF) sent a letter to Puerto Rico’s Governor Wanda Vázquez that denounced her recent signing of a bill to authorize cockfighting because it has “no binding legal effect” but does have the practical effect of “promoting illegal activity.”

On December 20th, a federal law passed one year ago went into effect banning cockfighting and dogfighting everywhere in the United States, including in Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories. In late October, U.S. District Court Judge Gustavo A. Gelpí rejected claims by Club Gallístico and other cockfighters in Puerto Rico challenging the amendment to the Animal Welfare Act. Judge Gelpí granted the federal government’s motion for summary judgment, declaring that “[n]either the Commonwealth’s political statutes, nor the Territorial Clause, impede the United States Government from enacting laws that apply to all citizens of this Nation alike, whether as a state or territory.” On December 20th, a three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals for the First Circuit denied an emergency stay sought by the cockfighting clubs.

“The maneuver by the Commonwealth’s politicians to authorize cockfighting without any legitimate authority to do so abets criminal acts of animal cruelty,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action. “We have received dozens of reports of staged fighting, and this behavior reflects contempt for the rule of law. Elected officials, duly bound by the Constitution of the United States, were reckless in claiming that cockfighting is legal. They are very well aware that it is illegal and a felony.”

“Puerto Rico is seeking billions of dollars in aid from the United States as a consequence of the hurricanes and earthquakes that have devastated parts of our island,” added Hernández Martí, an Animal Law attorney based in San Juan.. “I am struck by the terrible inconsistency that politicians, including many who support statehood, are openly defying federal laws against animal cruelty. They cannot have it both ways.”

Under the federal anti-animal fighting law, 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 use 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 notes that the claims of the economic impact of cockfighting, including 25,000 jobs, are wildly exaggerated. The 2012 Puerto Rico Census of Agriculture (COA) — the last available document on the website and available to the public — reports 324 “cockfighting farms” reporting 6,667 fighting cocks and sales of \$1,187,102. It is already illegal under federal law for any birds to be shipped into or out of Puerto Rico for fighting purposes, and that would be the main way money is generated.

Citizens can send tips and other information to animalcrueltytips@animalwellnessaction.org. The reward program is also mentioned on www.endcockfighting.org, which serves as a comprehensive resource about the issue and call to action for citizens to help end this illegal

animal cruelty.

The Animal Wellness Foundation (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.

Animal Wellness Action (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.

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