

Turn in

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Today, I would like to speak as a horse owner, 4-H volunteer, teacher, parent and grandparent in regard to the concerns about the enforcement of the Horse Protection Act. I would like to advocate for common sense when interpreting the law for non-trotting breeds such as the Tennessee Walking horse.

A few years ago, my daughter showed walking horses before the saddle off and saddle on at each inspection was enacted. Even at that time, there was an awareness that some in the industry were guilty of harming their horses for the sake of making a "good show" or for profit. At no time, have I or other non-trotting horse owners that I know ever advocated such treatment nor would we allow our daughter to ever be a part of this activity. At that time, I am certain that we fell into a majority of how most non-trotting horse owners felt about this process. Now that my granddaughter is showing horses, we still hold the same belief and are glad that someone finally decided to try to stop those who willfully harm horses by soring or using other methods to force a horse to perform unnaturally. The Horse Protection Act certainly needed to be enforced, however, the clock pendulum has swung too far in its interpretation, and the results are injurious to our youth and other non-trotting horse owners.

First of all, I am concerned that children who choose to show Tennessee Walking Horses at 4-H shows, local shows, and all-breed shows are treated as if they have done something wrong or might do something illegal. It is a difficult position to be in when you try to explain to children why they are subjected to treatment that makes them appear to be a suspect of possible horse abuse. You try explaining that treatment to a 9 or 10 year old sometime and answer all the "whys," and you will find out firsthand how hard it is and just how much your argument doesn't hold weight.

One injurious effect of the enforcement of Horse Protection Act is discrimination. Consider the perception of other people when they see a non-trotting horse and its rider singled out and treated as if they may do something wrong if they are not constantly watched. For example, at last year's state 4-H show, children were asked to untack their horse, stand in the blistering sun and bake, while others with non-trotting saddle type horses could walk their horses past the DQP with no inspections of any kind, back to the shade of the barn or arena, while non-trotting horses had to suffer the scrutiny of their peers. Many of those peers were not aware of why the non-trotting horses and their riders are singled out. They most likely thought that these children had done something wrong or they wouldn't be standing there. In my experience as a parent and teacher I know that children have a more pure sense of right and wrong. And in these cases, they feel that they are being discriminated against because they own or choose to show a non-trotting horse. So, I would like to question the fairness of treating one type of horse in this fashion with no regard to other types of abuses that we are well aware of in all breeds. Wouldn't it be fairer to ask everyone to be scrutinized equally? Why is there such a discrimination against one breed especially when no profit is involved? When children show in 4-H, the primary purpose of their showing should be to demonstrate the bond that they have with their horse. Perhaps, the Horse Protection Act should be amended when it comes to children's shows like 4-H, when prize money is not awarded, and where horses are not even required to be registered in a breed registry in order to participate. Certainly, the public's awareness and knowledge about illegal practices

such as soring and other inhumane treatments is vast enough that the show management would not be able to tolerate it without a public outcry.

Another concern that occurs is the safety of the children and the horses while they are contained in an area beside the DQP. At one of the shows last year, there was no shade permitted (although it was available) for the children or the horses to take refuge under when the temperatures soared over 100 degrees. This in itself should be considered inhumane for children as well as animals. In any other activity, common sense dictates that we don't permit our children to stay outside in such extreme temperatures and horse owners try to provide areas of shade for their horses. Without a doubt, there needs to be some regard for the safety of the children as well as the animals when the Horse Protection Act is being enforced. Child protection laws exist to protect the child, and the whole point of the Horse Protection Act is to protect the horse. So, if a dangerous or a potentially dangerous situation exists, then it should be resolved immediately by the DQP, USDA inspectors, and others who are supervising a show. Otherwise, there will be no question where liability will fall if injury, or God forbid, death of a horse or rider are the end result of these dangerous situations. It seems to me that the interpretation of HPA should not be a compromise on safety for the horse or the rider.

To conclude, I would like to say how much I appreciate the opportunity you have given me today to voice my feelings. As a Tennessee Walking Horse owner and rider for many years, I believe the breed to be one of the finest in the industry. Personally, I believe that the Horse Protection Act was long overdue in its enforcement, but I do not believe it should have been written and enacted to single out one type of breed, but rather to protect all horses. From what I have observed to this point, it has become a law that is interpreted in such a way that it currently discriminates against non-trotting horse owners-- which is certainly wrong if not illegal. More importantly, its interpretation in some cases, has actually jeopardized the safety and well-being of horses and riders. It is clear that the Horse Protection Act represents a conscious awareness that there are people who willfully harm horses or it wouldn't exist. However, I advocate that this law be interpreted fairly towards **all** horse owners and riders and towards **all** horse breeds.

Thank you once again.