

February 12, 2025

The Honorable Marc Korman, Chair

Environment & Transportation Committee

250 Taylor House Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: HB 513 – Agriculture - Roosters – Restrictions – (Cockfighting) FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Korman, Vice Chair Boyce and Members of the Committee:

I am Thomas Pool, senior veterinarian for Animal Wellness Action. I write in strong support of HB 513. This effort cheaply and surgically inhibits felony cockfighters from their vile trade without inhibiting legitimate poultry operations in any way

Cockfighting has long been very difficult to control because the tournaments are usually held in secret in rural areas. These are dangerous men often involved in drug and weapons smuggling and human trafficking. The beauty of HB 513 is that it does not require outnumbered law enforcement officers to wade into the heart of an ongoing cockfight. Enforcement can occur before a lot of damage is done, and it does so effectively because those roosters are the economic engine of this criminal enterprise.

I spent 26 years as an Army veterinarian, and as a full colonel I commanded the US Army Veterinary Command. It is a world-wide, tri-service command of more than 2,000 people, and it enabled me to become familiar with the global scourge of cockfighting. I retired and spent another 17 years as the Territorial Veterinarian for Guam, where cockfighting is rampant. There is no redeeming feature of this horrible pastime of sadists, and cockfighting has nothing whatever to do with agriculture.

I saw a brisk, illegal trade of fighting birds to Guam. The federal government and the Guam Department of Agriculture should never have allowed the importation of those fighting birds in contravention of federal law. But I was wondering, why are the states tolerating these massive cockfighting breeding operations in their backyards and tossing the problem to us? HB 513 addresses that problem.

I have been a board-certified specialist in veterinary preventive medicine for more than 30 years, and I have not seen a greater animal threat to human health than the H5N1 avian influenza pandemic. Because of the very intimate contact cockfighters

have with their birds, and because the roosters are kept outside in easy contact with infected wild birds, cockfighters may represent the most likely avenue for the H5N1 flu virus to reassort with human influenza and create the pandemic we have feared for 20 years.

There are a hundred more reasons to take every opportunity to discourage and eliminate cockfighting. HB 513 represents one of the easiest and most focused avenues along that journey. I implore you to support HB 513 for the sake of the voters of Maryland and truly all the people of the entire United States. Thank you for your attention.

Thomas Pool

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