

**Storehouse Ministries International
dba: Racetrack Chaplaincy of Maryland**



ATTN: WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

Subject: Support for House Bill 337

Storehouse Ministries is a non-profit organization based in Maryland, founded in 2021 by Chaplain Ronald Singh. As a retired jockey, Chaplain Singh recognized the need for support within the horse racing community. In 2021, Storehouse Ministries affiliated with the Racetrack Chaplaincy of Maryland, operating under the direction of a board of directors, to provide vital support services to backstretch workers, support personnel, jockeys, and other stakeholders.

Storehouse Ministries currently provides the following services:

- Collaboration with local church food pantries to provide meals at the racetrack
- Pickup and distribution of food donations
- Dinner services for racetrack staff and jockeys
- Weekly church services with a full meal for attendees
- Transportation for medical and social services
- Non-denominational Christian services, including:
 - Weddings
 - Funerals
 - Baptisms
 - Bible studies
 - Worship services
 - Hospital visits
 - Chaplain counseling and spiritual support
 - Onsite food pantry

We strongly support **House Bill 337** as it will enable the Racetrack Chaplaincy of Maryland to expand and maintain current services while also providing new services that are critically needed in the racetrack community.

A Chaplaincy Under the Umbrella of The Racetrack Chaplaincy of America

The Racetrack Chaplaincy of America is an established presence at most racetracks across the country, focusing on the spiritual, emotional, physical, and social needs of people living and working at racetracks. Chaplaincies nationwide complement the outstanding services provided by the respective Jockey Clubs and Thoroughbred Associations. With the advantage of having a Chaplain directly involved with the racetrack community on a daily basis, we can fill any service gaps, ensuring that no need is overlooked.

Healthcare Services

Background: Nearly 70% of backstretch workers experience at least one nonfatal injury or respiratory illness each year. Unfortunately, no healthcare benefits are provided to workers at Maryland racetracks.

Current Services Provided by the Maryland Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association (MTHA):

- \$2,000 per year voucher for medical expenses with specific contracted doctors
- \$1,000 per year voucher for dental coverage with contracted dentists
- On-site doctor consultations are available only on race days (typically Friday through Sunday)

Proposed Services:

- Support for workers applying for health coverage through the Maryland Health Exchange
- Assistance with understanding Maryland Health Exchange coverage
- Translation assistance for limited English or non-English speakers
- Emergency medical transportation, available 24/7, for workers without personal vehicles
- Provide a balanced meal service 2-3 times a week, as cooking is not permitted in residential facilities due to fire concerns

- Emergency fund for healthcare exchange co-pays
- Host on-track Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings to support workers struggling with alcohol or health-related issues (e.g., three workers lost in 2024 due to alcohol/health complications)
- Create a "Meals 2 Go" program for grooms traveling with horses to out-of-state tracks, ensuring they have access to meals while away
- Provide transportation to local exercise classes and onsite fitness classes
- Establish a sports league (e.g., soccer, basketball) for men, women, and teenagers
- Implement a community garden project to provide healthy food and support wellness and mental health
- Support services for jockeys facing health and wellness challenges related to weight reduction and purging
- Nutritional consultations to prevent health issues related to jockeys' weight management practices
- Physiotherapy (PT) and massage therapy services to assist with pain management without medication

Funding can support the following:

- Staff (including bilingual staff)
- Transportation (vehicle)
- Office space
- Computers and internet access

Social Services

Background: Currently, the Maryland Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association (MTHA) provides limited transportation assistance to backstretch workers during business hours, and, depending on bus driver availability, for accessing social services. This can be overwhelming due to the large number of residents and workers seeking assistance. Many track workers are migrant workers who do not speak English as their first language, creating an additional barrier in accessing necessary services.

Proposed Services:

- Implement a women's support group focusing on nutrition, women's health, and ESL classes

- Transportation to social service appointments, including local social service offices, schools, Social Service Administration visits, civil court appointments, and immigration offices, with translation services provided
- Tax preparation clinic
- Immigration services clinic
- Pathway to citizenship counseling
- Advice and translation related to social services, immigration, Social Security, the IRS, banks, and civil services

Funding can support the following:

- Staff (including bilingual staff)
- Transportation (vehicle)
- Computers and internet access

Food Pantry/Services & Clothing Drive

Background: Both on-track and off-track residents are migrant workers with a 10-month visa. They may need to wait one to two weeks before receiving their first paycheck. Storehouse Ministries frequently assists with groceries and cash assistance during this period. The average groom earns \$125 per horse in their care, with a weekly average of \$600 if salaried. Hot walkers typically earn \$400 per week, but only \$20 per horse if not salaried.

On-track residents are often left without access to food after lunch hours, as the track's food services close, and cooking is not allowed due to fire concerns.

Proposed Services:

- Establish a facility to prepare, store, distribute, and serve food to on-track residents
- Meal preparation services for the meals provided
- Employ cooks from the racetrack to assist with meal preparation
- Operate a "Meals 2 Go" program for grooms accompanying horses to out-of-state tracks (e.g., Delaware Park, Charlestown, PARX)
- Run a clothing pantry for both on-track and off-track workers, including soliciting and processing donations

Transportation Services

Background: Many resident track workers lack access to transportation and do not own vehicles. This creates barriers to accessing medical and social services, as well as grocery shopping.

Proposed Services:

- Provide transportation to medical and social service appointments
- Emergency transportation services
- Grocery trips to essential food markets

We respectfully request the Committee's support for **House Bill 337**, which will help expand and enhance critical services for the racetrack community, ensuring their health, welfare, and access to necessary resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chaplin Ronald Singh'. The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large initial 'C' and 'S'.

Chaplin Ronald Singh
Storehouse Ministries International
Racetrack Chaplaincy of Maryland