

January 17, 2026

Esteemed Members of the Senate,

I am writing to you today to urge your support for Senate Bill 231: a measure that asks a simple question: What do we owe the horses who have given us their speed, their heart, and their very bodies in service of Maryland's racing heritage?

For more than two decades, the racehorse has been my teacher. These magnificent animals drew me into "the game," and they have kept me there through triumph and heartbreak alike. But as an elder millennial watching this sport stand at a crossroads, I cannot ignore what confronts us: racing's social license to operate hangs in the balance. As Americans grow increasingly disconnected from agriculture and distanced from the origins of what appears on their tables, we face a reckoning. Senate Bill 231 offers us a chance to demonstrate that Marylanders honor our heritage—a heritage written in the hoofbeats of horses who raced to build this state's identity through one of the most recognizable and iconic sporting events—the Preakness, which stands as the second jewel of thoroughbred racing's Triple Crown.

This legislation does more than impose overdue restrictions on shipping racehorses to slaughter when they are deemed "past use." It strikes at the heart of a predatory system. What insiders grimly call the "bail pen economy." Picture this: livestock auctions have weaponized compassion itself. Racehorses appear online, often on social media, accompanied by photographs and descriptions engineered to provoke panic and heartbreak. The goal? Drive up prices by exploiting well-meaning people who cannot bear to let these animals face the slaughterhouse. It is emotional extortion masquerading as commerce, and it places crushing financial burdens on the very rescue organizations and aftercare facilities working to save these lives.

I know this reality intimately. As the former aftercare liaison for Santa Anita Park, one of the nation's premier Thoroughbred racetracks, I lived inside this nightmare. My responsibilities were clear: identify horses who had raced at Santa Anita and had surfaced at auction or in kill pens, then arrange funding, transportation, care and placement before time ran out. And time always ran out too quickly.

Saving a life is never easy when that life has been assigned a dollar value based on "carcass weight," an abhorrent term given to the value a horse will bring upon its slaughter. Windows of opportunity measured in hours, not days. Prices inflated far beyond any reasonable market value. I made desperate calls to former owners, trainers, and breeders—anyone with a connection to these horses, anyone who might help. More often than not, there was no help coming. What saved these horses was a dedicated network of aftercare professionals and individuals who simply could not look away, who scraped together resources they could barely afford, who stayed up through the night coordinating rescue missions to spare horses from a fate too grisly to describe in polite company.

But here is what haunts me: for every horse we saved, how many did we miss? How many horses who once thundered down Maryland tracks, who carried our hopes and our wagers, who

generated revenue for this state. How many ended their days in terror and agony because we failed to protect them?

Senate Bill 231 is more than policy. It is a statement of values. It declares that Maryland and its racing industry accept our role as stewards—not just users—of these animals. It acknowledges that our responsibilities do not end when a horse crosses the finish line for the final time, or when age or injury renders them unprofitable. It recognizes that the social compact between humans and horses demands more of us than indifference to their suffering.

The opponents of this bill may argue about economic impact or personal property rights. But I would ask them: At what cost to our collective conscience? What price can we place on our integrity as a Commonwealth?

This legislation will not solve every problem facing retired racehorses. But it will close one particularly cruel chapter. It will remove one avenue of exploitation. It will send an unmistakable message that in Maryland, horses who have served us will not be discarded like broken machinery.

I urge you to pass Senate Bill 231. Let us prove that our heritage means something beyond nostalgia and tourism dollars. Let us demonstrate that the horses who wrote Maryland's story deserve better than a slaughterhouse ending.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Jeanne Schnell

Supporter of the racing industry

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