



*Greensprings Veterinary Service*  
*Gail T. Colbern, DVM, MS, DACT*

06 February, 2024

House Committee on Gambling Regulations  
House Bill 4051 Position: Oppose

Dear Chair Lively, Vice Chair Chaichi, Vice Chair Wright and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns about the proposed House Bill 4051. I am a veterinarian in Oregon, currently in private small animal practice, but I spent several years in private general practice at the racetracks in Northern California. I have also worked extensively with horses throughout my life.

HB4051 has elements directing veterinarians to report to the Oregon Racing Commission any horse with signs of 'abuse, injury or inadequate health' if the veterinarian 'has reasonable cause to believe it is involved in horse racing'. This is an admirable statement and meant to help reduce the number of catastrophic injuries of racehorses in Oregon. We ALL want this result. I have several concerns, however, that this new rule would have the opposite effect resulting in MORE rather than fewer catastrophic injuries.

There are already laws in place to address 'abuse' for all animals in the State of Oregon. This new rule may actually interfere with these laws already in place. As to 'injury or inadequate health', on the surface, HB 4051 may point out things that could be considered by the official track veterinarian resulting in scratch of horses that really should not be racing. This, however, requires the trainers to actually consult their veterinarians about their horses. A rule such as HB4051 would likely result in more trainers NOT consulting their veterinarians about problems they see with their horses. And this may result in MORE catastrophic injuries, not fewer.

A lot has been put in the number of catastrophic injuries in Oregon over the last couple of years, 4 in 2023 with 1 additional accidental injury resulting from a breakdown injury of another horse. The problem with this statistic is the small number of events that actually occur in Oregon. Horse racing has diminished in Oregon and there were only 124 race starts in Oregon in 2023. This makes the value of this statistic much less reliable and not really comparable to the statistics for horse racing around the country or the world.

There are so many factors that go into cause of catastrophic racing injuries and the health of the horse is only one. Much has been done to consider all the factors causing catastrophic musculoskeletal injuries (CMI) in race horses. Many of them are horse related (older horse age, training levels of horse, distances traveled at speed, class of race (with both higher class horses and lower claiming price horses having more injuries), medications administered. But there are many non-horse factors to consider:

race track condition (firm turf and wet dirt both associated with more injuries), longer race distances, number of horses starting a given race, current weather conditions.

It would be helpful to address the relationship of the owners, trainers and private veterinarians at the horse racetrack. Most horses are managed and trained by a trainer hired by the horse's owner. The trainer is responsible for the care and training of the horse and most owners have very little input. The trainers hire a veterinarian to care for the health needs of the horses in their charge. The veterinarian and trainer have a VCPR, or veterinarian client patient relationship, that is formally recognized by the Oregon Veterinary Medical Examining Board as required to administer veterinary care and medications. The VCPR is a trust relationship that provides the animal (patient) with the best quality of veterinary care. Requiring that the veterinarian report health concerns to a third party would definitely affect this trust. Trainers would likely not ask a veterinarian for care when getting a horse ready for a race, in fear that the animal would then be scratched from the race. This could result in more unhealthy horses being started, not less.

Considerations of ALL of the factors that have resulted in more CMI needs to be done to reduce the incidence of CMI to its lowest possible level. This is currently being done through HISA, the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority, to implement a national uniform set of integrity and safety rules under the auspices of the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act passed by Congress in 2020. Although HISA applies only to Thoroughbred racing, the rules can be considered here in Oregon and applied to all horse racing, if applicable.

Again, thank you for your consideration of my comments and my suggestion to oppose HB4051. A thoughtful consideration of ALL the factors increasing risk of CMI should be performed and new rules established with these in mind.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gail T. Colbern DVM". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gail T. Colbern, DVM, MS, DACT  
Oregon Veterinary License #6781header