



President: David W. Williams | Senior VP: Stephen B. Smith | Executive Director: Rory R. Williams | Secretary: James Heiting

TENNESSEE WALKING HORSE BREEDERS' AND EXHIBITORS' ASSOCIATIONSM

An Open Letter to Members of the United States House of Representatives and United States Senate regarding the PAST Act (HR 1847 and S 2957)

My name is David W. Williams and I am currently serving my 3rd term as President of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association (TWHBEA). Our organization is the largest member driven breed organization for the Tennessee Walking Horse and it is the nationally recognized breed registry for the Tennessee Walking Horse. I have recently been informed about a letter you and/or members of your staff have recently received from Mr. Marty Irby of Animal Wellness Action concerning the PAST Act and I felt that his allegations and his omissions of vital, factual, information needed to be corrected as quickly as possible.

I, like Mr. Irby, have also grown up owning, working with and participating in shows highlighting the magnificent Tennessee Walking Horse. Like Mr. Irby and his family, I and my family have been lifelong participants and have competed and been victorious at a World Championship level. Unlike Mr. Irby, I have NEVER been in violation of the Horse Protection Act or received any citation for failure of any horse inspection while showing Tennessee Walking Horses. I am part of the vast majority of the many participants who love and show Tennessee Walking Horses under the scrutiny of the inspectors of the Horse Industry Organizations and the United States Department of Agriculture.

Please understand that currently, today, the Tennessee Walking Horse is the most inspected equine breed in the world. Through inspectors provided by the various Horse Industry Organizations and by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), our horses are inspected for violations or conditions inconsistent with the requirements of the Horse Protection Act before and, in many cases, after they have performed. No other breed of horse in the world is subjected to the inspections and oversight our horses receive. We welcome that scrutiny and inspection because we wish to remove anyone that purposefully harms or "sores" a horse. And this scrutiny and inspection and our constant communication and interaction with APHIS continue to have significant results as we have long intended and hoped. Using the data provided on the APHIS web site the current compliance rate in FY 2018 is 95.2% for horses wearing pads and action devices. These are the horses Mr. Irby says must be sore to compete, a claim not backed in any fact. I highly commend the U.S.D.A in



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their communication with participants and their enforcement of the Horse Protection Act.

Also, like Mr. Irby, I have seen in the past training techniques that were very questionable. Unlike Mr. Irby, I was involved in showing before the passage of the Horse Protection Act of 1970 and I have seen the many changes that came into effect at that time. I have seen the improved inspections and compliance tools being used today by our breed inspection organizations or by APHIS through the mandates of the Horse Protection Act. As the compliance numbers above show, the degree of improvement of the horses shown today, with regard to their humane treatment, has come so far from the Horse Protection Act implementation that our horse of today would never be questioned and the impetuosity of the need of The Horse Protection Act would have been eliminated.

Mr. Irby cites an ABC Nightline expose' of which "soring" was the subject. It involved an undercover operation in **one (1)** barn. This expose' did show acts toward horses in an extremely inhumane manner. I personally was appalled by the video. Those involved were tried and punished. What should be noted is not one act depicted, as horrific as they may be, is prevented by the Horse Protection Act nor in any part of the amendments to the Horse Protection Act otherwise known as the PAST ACT. Mr. Irby's committee he cites did pass their approval of the Past Act introduction, but that recommendation was reversed by our National Board of Directors at TWHBEA due to being overreaching and with questionable ties to the Humane Society of the United States. I would like to also note that Mr. Irby has run for leadership positions at the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association since this time and has never been successful.

The focus of Mr. Irby and the Humane Society is to get rid of the equipment that our show horses use in the show ring. The padded or "built up" or "stacked" shoes and the action device which could be a boot, or anklet or small light chain as is used today would be outlawed by the PAST Act. From the beginning of the implementation of The Horse Protection Act of 1970, a study was undertaken by veterinarians at the University of Auburn and in that study, limits or certain acceptable heights and weights were determined to be harmless to the horse and these limits are in our regulations today and are strictly enforced on each and every horse that enters a show ring governed by any of our many Horse Industry Organizations and the United States Department of Agriculture. Also, in that same study the weight of the action device/chain which would do no harm to the horse was determined and even today our limit of that weight is much



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less than the study determined as to be safe. Again, these limitations of equipment are enforced on each, and every, horse that enters the show ring governed by our industry inspectors working side by side with the U.S.D.A. inspectors. Even more recently a study by The University of Tennessee has reconfirmed the limitations applied to our current equipment as not causing harm to a horse. It is also important to understand that other breeds such as the American Saddlebred, Morgan Horse, Arabians and many Draft breeds use some of the same equipment for performing that Tennessee Walking Horses use.

Because of that widespread use among breeds, it begs the question of how can inanimate objects such as the padded shoe and the ankle action device that several breeds use be deemed harmful to one breed but harmless to the others? They cannot. It is much like the gun debate many of you have ongoing in Congress now. If all the guns were illegal to use than no harm will come to anyone from a gun. Which we all should know is a failed assumption. Legislating the intentions of a person is impossible. The darkness of a person's heart cannot be seen. Those that fail our current inspections are not allowed to show their horses, period. The many photographs and/or video links of show horses many of you have received are used to depict a false narrative that there is no inspection process and Congress must do something. The truth of the matter is that the predominate majority of these photos and video links are of horses that have passed a thorough inspection and follow all the guidelines set out by the Horse Protection Act and are deemed humanely trained and able to show. Though Mr. Irby and many of his thinking are aware that these inspections do take place and are performed by the United States Department of Agriculture currently in many cases, they present to you a false or untrue scenario of no regulation, no inspection and no oversight of the walking horse and this is a significant and terrible omission of what is currently being done by APHIS and by our industry inspectors who are trained and work alongside the U.S.D.A. inspectors.

In closing, as a lifelong horse enthusiast, I would never practice any act that would harm these wonderful horses and the vast majority of our breed's enthusiasts also fall into that category. The Horse Protection Act as it is currently written and implemented, while not perfect, has done a great job in guarding against the abuse of our horses. Our United States Department of Agriculture has been doing a wonderful job ensuring that those rules and regulations are regularly and fairly enforced. These changes that the Past Act would implement are flawed and would have many consequences, both intended and unintended. I would implore each of you to not be supportive of the PAST Act but, rather, work with us and others truly interested in



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protecting our amazing Tennessee Walking Horse through a modernization of sorts of the current Horse Protection Act. And, finally, I would sincerely hope that you would wish for, and expect to receive, information on this subject and these issues from people who fairly and completely represent the truth on this subject matter.

I very much appreciate your time in reviewing this letter and considering the information I have provided and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need any additional information.

Sincerely,

David W. Williams

President of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association

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