

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 2, 2024

The Honorable Merrick Garland
Attorney General for the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Garland,

This weekend, thousands will gather to watch the Kentucky Derby, as we kick off the Triple Crown season, and as representatives of the districts that are home to the Kentucky Derby and the Belmont Stakes, we are deeply troubled by the February 15 *Washington Post* article “The Feds’ Raid on a ‘Bush Track’ Fizzled, so Horses Kept Racing—and Dying.”¹ For the protection of the legal and sanctioned horse racing industry, we urge you to renew your investigation of illegal bush tracks and act against those who are clearly violating federal law.

For general awareness, “bush tracks” are places where unsanctioned horse races take place, oftentimes housing illegal gambling and doping rings as well. These horses and jockeys race free from the oversight of state commissions, industry rules, and safety regulations. This leads to mishandling of animals and a host of other criminal activities. Four years ago, Congress passed the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act of 2020² to protect horses and Thoroughbred racing. This legislation resulted in the creation of the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority. The Authority for the first time ever has implemented a national, uniform set of integrity and safety rules that are applied consistently to every Thoroughbred racing participant and racetrack facility. These rules and regulations are designed to enhance the safety and well-being of both horse and rider while ensuring the integrity of the sport for the benefit of the industry, fans, and bettors.

We are deeply disturbed by reports of the use of electroshock devices and the deaths of horses whose bodies are then tossed into nearby fields to rot at these bush tracks. None of this would be tolerated at sanctioned tracks, and, if this illicit industry is allowed to thrive, it will have a negative impact on legitimate racing, both reputationally and in merit.

The integrity of horseracing is vital to its success. Essential to preserving that integrity is upholding high standards for owners and jockeys alike. The reported proliferation of illegal substances consumed by, and in the vicinity of the horses, jockeys and owners, the bookmaking, and the alleged endangerment of underage jockeys are all illegal activities that warrant immediate action. These activities take place in abundance at illegal bush track racing facilities.

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2024/02/15/bush-tracks-horse-deaths-drugs/>

² <https://www.congress.gov/bills/116/congress/house-bill/1754?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22horse+racing+integrity+and+safety+act%22%7D&s=3&r=8>

The lack of enforcement of safety measures coupled with the rampant unlawful practices and inhumane treatment of horses makes a mockery of the distinguished sport of horseracing and threatens the public's trust in well-regulated horse races. We ask that you stand against those harming horses in these unsanctioned races. In order to preserve such iconic and revered parts of our communities, we request that the Department of Justice resume their investigation and take action against these illegal bush track racing facilities.

Sincerely,



Morgan McGarvey
Member of Congress



Anthony D'Esposito
Member of Congress