

Fight Inhumane Gambling and High-Risk Animal Trafficking Act H.R. 2742 and S. 1529

The [federal law](#) prohibiting dogfighting and cockfighting is one of our nation’s bedrock animal cruelty statutes. Despite being criminalized everywhere in the United States, staged animal fighting is startlingly widespread. The FIGHT Act, amending Section 26 of the Animal Welfare Act would enhance enforcement capacity:

- Banning simulcasting and gambling of animal fighting ventures;
- Halting the shipment of mature roosters (chickens only) shipped through the U.S. mail (this legislation does not address shipping baby chicks, who are used in accepted animal agricultural operations; it is already illegal to ship dogs through the mail);
- Creating a citizen suit provision, after proper notice to federal authorities, to allow private right of action against illegal animal fighters and ease the resource burden on federal agencies; and enhancing forfeiture provisions to include real property for animal fighting crimes.

In the House, it was introduced by Representatives Don Bacon, R-Neb., and Andrea Salinas, D-Oregon. In the Senate, it was introduced by Senators Cory Booker, D-N.J., and John Kennedy, R-La.

Animal Fighting Criminals Operate Openly and Widely

From Puerto Rico to Alabama to Oklahoma to California to Guam, there are hundreds of cockfighting pits and thousands of traffickers of fighting animals in the U.S., with many adherents maintaining extensive cockfighting breeding, training, and fighting complexes. Dogfighting also operates on a nationwide and global scale with enthusiasts paying attention to bloodlines and trafficking in fighting dogs.

A Philippines-based television network in 2020 released 50 videos showing two hosts making visits to these cockfighting complexes, where the American cockfighters tout the bloodlines of their fighting birds, with some of the animals destined for big global events such as the “World Slasher Derby” in Manilla. One Alabama-based cockfighting operator told the Filipino television broadcaster that he sells 6,000 birds a year to Mexico alone for as much as \$2,000 a bird, generating millions in illegal sales.

Staged fights involve pitting specially bred and trained animals against each other for illegal gambling. The animals are often drugged to heighten their aggression and forced to keep fighting even after they’ve suffered grievous injuries such as broken bones, deep gashes, flesh tears, punctured lungs, and pierced eyes. In cockfighting, birds have sharp metal weapons attached to their legs to enhance bloodletting.

Animal Fighting Gambling Surging on the Web

The FIGHT Act would also address the growing international broadcasting and wagering on cockfighting, in an era when sports and other forms of on-line gambling have emerged as multi-billion-dollar forms of wagering. Even though cockfighting generated billions in on-line gaming in his country, former Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte issued a ban on online betting at cockfights after dozens of people [were kidnapped](#) and [never heard from again](#) in the country. One woman, who had unpaid gambling debts accrued through on-line cockfights, reportedly [sold her child](#) to pay off her debts.

Animal fighting is often associated with other criminal activities, such as gangs, gambling, drug trafficking, illegal weapons dealing, public corruption, and various violent crimes including homicide, child abuse, and human trafficking. Multiple federal investigations have also revealed animal fighting to be an intricate and organized criminal enterprise, responsible for moving multi-ton quantities of heroin and methamphetamines across the country. There are numerous casualties at animal fights, including a [referee murdered at an illegal cockfight in Miami](#), a person [shot at a Dallas cockfight](#) in March 2023, and [two killed and three wounded](#) at a Hawaii cockfight in April 2023. In Mexico last year, in a case of gang violence, there were 20 people [massacred](#) at a cockfighting derby, including one Chicagobased mother and her sister badly wounded at the event.

Congress Recognizes Animal Fighting as a Moral, Animal Health, and Social Concern

The Congress has strengthened the law against animal fighting [five times](#), with Animal Fighting Prohibitions Enforcement Act enacted in 2007 and through Farm bill amendments in 2002, 2008, 2014, and 2018. You can read about the legislative history of animal fighting [here](#). And read about the federal courts upholding all provisions of the animal-fighting law as constitutional, with a [summary here](#).

These amendments protect public health and safeguard poultry suppliers from diseases such as avian flu and virulent Newcastle disease. *Virulent Newcastle disease has entered the United States by illegal smuggling of infected cockfighting roosters from Mexico at least ten times, causing that epidemic in southern California in 2002-03 and also a massive outbreak in 2018-20, producing 16 million dead birds and \$1 billion in outlays from the federal government in containment costs.*

Gamefowl are high-risk disease vectors and reservoirs because they are reared outdoors under poor biosecurity and widely sold, traded, deliberately comingled with other birds at fighting derbies under stressful conditions. When H5N1 bird flu first emerged in southeast Asia in the early 2000s, cockfighters spread and maintained the epidemic. There is no reason to think that cockfighting will not play the same role as this outbreak continues, stretching out the duration of the outbreak, expanding the geographic footprint of the H5N1 bird flu epidemic, and potentially upgrading the virulence of the virus.

Bird flu H5N1 is worse than vND because [the bird flu virus easily mutates and can infect and kill people](#). Of [865 people in 21 countries \(including the US\) infected with HPAI H5N1 since 2003](#), 456 died for a 53% case fatality rate. Many H5N1 deaths in southeast Asia were among cockfighters who had close contact with infected birds.

There is a justified fear that the H5N1 bird flu virus may mutate into a strain capable of sustained humanto-human transmission, an event that would be far worse than the COVID-19 pandemic.

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