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February 10, 2020

Representative Michael Webber
Chair, Regulatory Reform Committee
Michigan House of Representatives

Via email: Molly Wingrove, Committee Clerk, mwingrove@house.mi.gov

Re: Opposition to SB 661, Regulatory Reform Committee Meeting, February 11, 2020

Dear Rep. Webber and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information to the committee. Attorneys for Animals, Inc. (AFA) is a Michigan non-profit and 501(c)(3) organization of legal professionals and animal advocates. The organization's Board of Directors voted to **oppose SB 661**.

This bill props up the dyingⁱ Michigan horseracing industry, an industry that is abusive to horses. This bill would legalize after-the-race betting, thereby encouraging more gambling on horse races by those who simply like to gamble.

Many of you have heard about the widely publicized deaths at the Santa Anita Racetrack in California since late 2018. But our own state has a recent history of horseracing deaths, too. A horse died in September 2019ⁱⁱ at Northville Downs, Michigan's sole remaining track. Another died there in July 2018.ⁱⁱⁱ Since 2015, when only one racetrack (Hazel Park Raceway) and one harness-racing track (Northville Downs) were open, reports obtained through FOIA requests reveal:

- 2017: 5 deaths at Hazel Park (data didn't include deaths from training accidents, or from the harness track).^{iv}
- 2016: 3 deaths (all Hazel Park)^v
- 2015: 3 deaths (2 at Hazel Park, 1 at Northville)^{vi}

The causes of death^{vii} clearly indicate the toll that this sport takes on the very animals who are used by it.

This bill would benefit one company in particular, which has plans to re-open a racetrack that closed some years ago. It is claimed in this case^{viii} as well as in an earlier – and failed^{ix} – effort in Wayne County to develop a racetrack near the airport, that these ventures can only survive if additional forms of gambling are allowed. However, this is a stop-gap measure and delaying tactic as the long-term

viability of the horseracing industry is doubtful. We urge committee members to consider whether this legislature should pass measures that only postpone its demise.

There are other uses for the property. A city official recently acknowledged: “If [the property is] not used for horse racing, the site has the potential to be redeveloped for another use...”^x

The revenue to the state from the new kind of gambling this bill would authorize cannot be seen in a vacuum. The pain and suffering caused to horses by this industry is of questionable financial benefit to the state. We urge that this bill not be reported out of committee.

Very Truly Yours,



Beatrice M. Friedlander, JD
President

ⁱ Saginaw Valley Downs, closed 2005 after 25 years of racing
Great Lakes Downs, closed 2007 after 18 years of racing
Jackson Harness Raceway, closed 2008 after 60 years of racing
Pinnacle Race Course, closed 2010 after 2 years of racing
Mount Pleasant Meadows, closed 2013 after 28 years of racing
Sports Creek Raceway, closed 2015 after 28 years of racing
Hazel Park, closed 2018 after 69 years of racing
Source: <https://horseracingwrongs.org/category/death-reports-michigan/>

ⁱⁱ Ibid, a horse named Smarter Yet died on September 14, 2019 due to “warming up for a race – cardiovascular collapse” per the Michigan Gaming Control Board, via a FOIA request

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, a horse named Ounce Hanover died on July 21, 2018 due to “fractured front leg” per the Michigan Gaming Control Board, via a FOIA request

^{iv} <https://horseracingwrongs.org/2018/02/03/suspensory-rupture-carpus-fracture-epistaxis-hazel-parks-dead-2017/>

^v <https://horseracingwrongs.org/2017/02/08/killed-at-hazel-park-2016/>

^{vi} <https://horseracingwrongs.org/2016/01/30/dead-in-michigan-2015/>

^{vii} A sampling includes “suspensory rupture”, the horse having been run in four races prior to dying and “epistaxis” (bled from the nose), *supra* at iv; “large vessel rupture”, *supra* at v; “post-race, ruptured artery”, *supra* at vi

^{viii} <https://www.mlive.com/news/flint/2020/01/sports-creek-owners-have-a-license-but-its-still-unclear-whether-they-race-in-2020.html>

^{ix} <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2019/12/19/former-race-track-property-sold/2687466001/>

^x “The officials have previously said state laws need to be changed to make horse racing viable again in Michigan, including making it easier for bettors to make wagers on their cell phones and allowing patrons to wager on races that have already occurred -- something that would allow for wagering even when live racing or simulcasting isn’t happening.” *Supra* at viii