

## FIGHT Act Combats Crime and Contagion

*H.R. 3946/S. 1454*

Staged animal fighting is a form of national and international organized crime. 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 — knives or gaffs — strapped to their legs to maim and deliver deep and lethal wounds.

The Fighting Inhumane Gambling and High-Risk Trafficking (FIGHT) Act amends our national law prohibiting organized dogfighting and cockfighting (7 U.S. Code § 2156) and gives law enforcement constitutionally sound enforcement tools to root out these persistent, widespread, and dangerous criminal enterprises by:

- banning online gambling on fighting ventures wherever the fights are staged;
- 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 private right of action, after proper notice is provided to federal and local law enforcement of an illegal fighting venture, allowing private property owners and others aggrieved by organized crime operations to bring a civil proceeding to shut down such ventures, easing the resource burden on federal agencies; and
- enhancing forfeiture provisions to include real property for animal fighting crimes.

The House bill, H.R. 3946, is led by Reps. Don Bacon, R-Neb., Anna Paulina Luna, R-Fla., and Andrea Salinas, D-Ore., and S. 1454 by Sens. John Kennedy, R-La., and Cory Booker, D-N.J. With more bipartisan support than any other animal welfare legislation introduced in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress, the FIGHT Act has more than 800 agencies and organizations endorsing it, including the National Sheriffs' Association; National District Attorneys Association; Small and Rural Law Enforcement Executive Association; American Gaming Association; United Egg Producers; Rose Acre Farms; Vital Farms; Indiana State Poultry Association; Ohio Poultry Association; the Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania,



Tennessee, and Texas state sheriffs' associations; and the state district attorney associations of Colorado, Louisiana, and Nebraska.

## ***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 tens of thousands of traffickers of fighting animals in the United States, with many adherents maintaining extensive cockfighting breeding, training, and fighting complexes. There may be as many as 20 million fighting birds maintained and bred in the United States, according to the USDA, with perhaps more than a million birds shipped to Mexico for fights at cartel-controlled pits. Dogfighting also operates on a nationwide and global scale, with enthusiasts paying attention to bloodlines and trafficking in fighting dogs to a dozen or more countries.

The number of interdictions is not close to keeping pace with the scale of criminal activity, though there have been notable arrests, including a **senior Pentagon official arrested** for running a 20-year dogfighting operation in the Washington D.C. area and a **major Alabama cockfighting family operation** with fighting pits on their properties and a record of shipping fighting animals across the world. There has not been a single enforcement action in Puerto Rico or Guam since Congress imposed a ban on animal fighting in the U.S. territories. Major pits operate openly, as do massive cockfighting breeding operations in plain sight of authorities, and apparently without fear of federal action.

A Philippines-based television network in 2019 released 50 videos featuring U.S.-based cockfighting kingpins touting the bloodlines and abilities of their fighting birds, with animals destined for cartel-controlled fighting pits in Mexico and major events in the Philippines, such as the World Slasher Derby, also run by organized crime networks. One Alabama-based operator told the Filipino television broadcaster that he sells 6,000 birds a year to Mexico alone, generating millions of dollars in untaxed revenues from this illicit trafficking.

## ***Animal Fighting Gambling Surging on the Web***

The FIGHT Act would also address international broadcasting and wagering on cockfighting. In 2022, there was more than \$12 billion generated from wagering on cockfighters there. There were at least **32 people kidnapped and never heard from again** in the country in crimes associated with gambling on cockfights. One woman reportedly **sold her child** to pay off unpaid debts from betting on cockfights.

“Animal fighting investigations have uncovered intricate criminal networks and connections to organized crime, trafficking narcotics, illegal firearms, and attempted bribery of elected officials,” according to the National Sheriffs’ Association **resolution endorsing the FIGHT Act**. “Dogfighting and cockfighting events present a danger to responding officers due to the often-large numbers of attendees, many of whom are armed,” and the association for the nation’s 3,000 elected sheriffs says that “people who participate in animal fighting often engage children in illegal activity causing them to witness or participate in violence.”

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 Oregon, in August 2023, a cockfighting and drug syndicate was involved with **human trafficking**. In November of that year, there was a double murder at a **Mississippi dogfighting event**.

U.S. cockfighters are closely consorting with Mexican cartels that run cockfighting pits in that nation. In late January 2024, there were 14 wounded and six murdered, including a **16-year-old from eastern Washington** at a cockfighting derby in the Mexican state of Guerrero. Months before, also in Mexico, 20 people were **massacred** at a cockfighting derby, including a Chicago woman. Cockfighting is bound up with drug trafficking and other cross-border crimes.

In November 2024, a Mexican cartel kingpin, a known cockfighter and also a driver of the fentanyl trade, was **arrested in Riverside County, Calif.** In April 2025, there were 12 murdered and nine other wounded at an outburst of violence at a cockfight in Ecuador, one more nation that U.S. cockfighters supply with fighting animals.

In April 2024, the U.S. Coast Guard crew said it intercepted an unlawful migrant voyage in Mona Passage which led to the discovery of the three reportedly gang-affiliated citizens wanted in connection with a fatal July 2020 shooting in Puerto Rico. The vessel was carrying “eight people along with multiple cockfighting roosters,” **according to the Coast Guard.**

### ***Congress Recognizes Animal Fights Animal Health, More Concern***

The Congress has strengthened the law against animal fighting **five times in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**, with the Animal Fighting Prohibitions Enforcement Act enacted in 2007 and by means of Farm bill amendments in 2002, 2008, 2014, and 2018.

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 an epidemic in southern California in 2002-03 and causing 16 million bird deaths and \$1 billion in outlays from the federal government in containment costs from a massive outbreak in 2018-20. Depopulation of commercial poultry flocks has resulted in killing of tens of millions of laying hens and poultry, shrinking U.S. production capacity, constraining supply for periods, and driving up egg and meat prices for consumers.

“Gamefowl are high-risk disease vectors and reservoirs because they are widely sold and traded, deliberately mixed under stressful conditions at fighting derbies, reared under poor biosecurity, and employ husbandry or fighting practices that spread disease,” according to the

**FIGHT Act endorsement letter** from Chad Gregory, president and CEO of the United Egg Producers. “Cockfighting drives outbreaks of serious poultry and zoonotic diseases, especially virulent Newcastle disease (vND) and highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI, “bird flu”) viruses. HPAI and vND spread widely and quickly and can kill virtually every wild bird species and all poultry. Neither virus is normally present in our homeland. When outbreaks occur, these viruses are controlled by lethal depopulation, sometimes resulting in the killing of millions of birds, and our flocks are particularly at risk because of our housing systems and stocking densities.”

Calling cockfighting “inhumane,” the National Chicken Council **noted** as long ago as 2006 that “fighting birds were ‘heavily implicated’ in an outbreak of exotic Newcastle disease in Southern California in 2002 and 2003,” adding that “the traffic associated with cockfighting could also spread avian influenza.” The United States has had a serious outbreak of H5N1 since 2022, resulting in mass depopulation of laying hens that passed on additional costs of \$20 billion to consumers. Cockfighting is widely viewed as playing a role in spread of H5N1 through backyard flocks, with birds widely moved as contraband nationally and internationally.

### ***Killing Wildlife***

Cockfighters commonly engage in illegal killing of raptors and other migratory birds as a form of predator control conducted to protect their illegal possession of fighting birds. Their fighting birds are tethered outside, and that makes them especially vulnerable to hawks, eagles, and owls. The federal charges against a cockfighting family in Alabama convicted of cockfighting crimes in 2022 **involved killing owls in violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.** Even after Oklahoma voters outlawed cockfighting by a ballot initiative, **31 cockfighters were cited** a year later for killing migratory birds. A **California major poaching ring** involving 21 individuals was also involved in illegal cockfighting.

**For more information on animal fighting, go to:**

Animal Fighting Is the Pits Campaign | Helping Animals Helps Us All or [www.EndCockfighting.org](http://www.EndCockfighting.org).