

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON RACING, GAMING AND WAGERING AND THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON DOMESTIC ANIMAL WELFARE

SUBJECT: The Welfare of Racehorses.

PURPOSE: To Examine the Health of Racehorses While Training and Racing, and
Resources for Aftercare.

Wednesday, June 5, 2019

10:00 A.M. – 2 P.M.

Legislative Office Building, Hearing Room A, 188 State Street, Albany, NY 12247

Testimony of the New York Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association

**Richard Schosberg, NYTHA Board Member and Chair of the NYTHA Aftercare Committee, and President of the TAKE2
Second Career Thoroughbred Program**

Andy Belfiore, Executive Director of NYTHA and the TAKE2 Second Career Thoroughbred Program

We are often asked, "Where do the horses go when they retire from racing?" Here in New York, we have a very good answer to that question. Historically, racehorse retirement was the responsibility of individual owners and trainers. Horsemen developed networks to find homes for their horses when it was time to leave the track, but there was no dedicated funding and no safety net to ensure that the horses had secure futures. But the landscape has changed drastically in the last eight years. Thanks to the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance and New York's TAKE THE LEAD Program, we now have revenue streams from a consortium of racing stakeholders, an accreditation process to screen the facilities that provide aftercare for our horses, a racetrack policy that strictly prohibits selling horses to slaughter and a system that works to support the horses retiring from New York's racetracks.

The Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance was born of a meeting of industry leaders at Belmont Park in 2011. Spearheaded by Saratoga resident Jack Wolf, the TAA launched in 2012 and since has distributed more than \$13.8 million in grants to accredited aftercare organizations; 7,800 Thoroughbreds have been retrained, rehomed, or retired by TAA accredited organizations. The funding comes from horsemen, breeders, stallion owners, racetracks, sales companies, consignors and buyers, media partners, veterinarians, horse players and racing fans, and individuals from throughout the sport. NYRA owners and trainers contribute \$5 per start, and NYTHA adds to those donations to make sure that the TAA receives at minimum \$100,000 a year from that program. NYRA also donates \$5 per start. In order to qualify for funding, the aftercare organizations must meet the necessarily strict standards set by the TAA.

Rick Violette Jr., then president of the New York Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association, was also one of the founding members of the TAA. Aftercare was a primary focus for Rick, and it was under his direction that TAKE THE LEAD was created in 2013. TAKE THE LEAD works with the owners and trainers at the NYRA racetracks to find homes with accredited aftercare organizations for our New York racehorses.

The majority of the funding for TAKE THE LEAD comes from the NYTHA. TAKE THE LEAD has placed 468 horses since the start, and has contributed \$789,624 toward their care. More than 60% of the horses are New York-breds. More than 99% of the program's funding is designated for equine medical care, transportation and donations to aftercare organizations. All of the work done on behalf of TAKE THE LEAD and our retired racehorses is pro bono.

Our TAKE THE LEAD Program simplifies the racehorse retirement process for New York's horsemen. Our owners and trainers need only to contact TAKE THE LEAD via text, email or phone call to find safe haven when it is time to retire their horses. TAKE THE LEAD provides the forms that need to be filled out to transfer the horse to a TAA-accredited partner, creating a paper trail to track each horse as it moves through the system. We gather medical information like X-rays, ultrasounds and medical reports, and we take photographs and videos of the horse. We work with racetrack veterinarians, who donate their time and expertise to give each horse a thorough physical examination to help to determine if the horse needs rehabilitation, how much R and R is required, where the best placement will be and even what second career is most suitable. Once a placement is found, we pass all pertinent information on to the TAA-accredited aftercare facility prior to the horse's arrival. TAKE THE LEAD arranges and pays for transportation to the new home, and sends a donation to help cover the cost of aftercare. New York's owners and trainers are also generous in making contributions to support the aftercare of their horses, donating over \$55,000 in the last 12 months directly to the organizations that will care for their retirees.

Injury does not disqualify a horse from acceptance into the TAKE THE LEAD Program. Many of the horses are retired simply because they are not competitive, or do not have the mental make-up to succeed as a racehorse. But we also see horses with suspensory and tendon injuries, or recovering from fractures, and those horses will be provided all the time and care needed to transition to a second career. These second careers are vast in scope and some are quite unique. They include everything from eventing, dressage and competitive show jumping to polo, police horses and even barrel racers to backyard trail horses and companion animals.

The use of retired racehorses in therapeutic settings is a relatively new vocation. Horses are valuable therapy partners for our veterans with PTSD issues, physically and emotionally challenged children and adults and also through programs assisting victims of domestic violence.

In rare instances, the horse may not be suitable for a second career. We have had fewer than a dozen horses in that category since the program started, and in those cases we have found homes with breeders, sales consignors or with accredited sanctuaries.

Any funding mechanism created by the legislature must support TAA-accredited organizations, so we can be assured that the funds are being used prudently and as intended, to support New York's retired racehorses. TAA's Code of Standards covers five key areas: operations, education, horse health care management, facility standards and services, and adoption policies and protocols. That last is of primary importance. A strict adoption policy is the safety net we need to ensure that horses do not fall through the cracks. Our ability to track horses has improved greatly in the last two years. The Jockey Club now requires that all registered Thoroughbreds are implanted with microchips, and NYTHA and NYRA are working together to microchip New York's horses that were foaled before that requirement went into effect. TAA-accredited aftercare organizations provide an additional layer of oversight, as our partners have a stringent screening process for potential horse adopters, and a policy that allows the horse to be returned if an adoption does not work out. There are frequent checks on the adopted horse by the organizations as well.

The Thoroughbreds now found in the so-called "kill pens" are almost without exception abandoned broodmares or horses retired before TAA and TAKE THE LEAD began operations. There are virtually no horses being sent to slaughter from New York's racetracks, because of the track's policy that would evict a trainer from the stable area if they were found doing so. There are virtually no horses being sent to slaughter from our TAA-accredited aftercare partners, because the adoption screening process is so rigorous and because of the liberal return policy. That is why we cannot emphasize strongly enough the need to work with TAA-accredited aftercare organizations.