



AMERICAN VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

WASHINGTON, DC OFFICE

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10/13/03

Ginger M. Podojil
20503 County Road 25
Damon, Texas 77430

Dear Ms. Podojil,

Thank you for taking the time to write the AVMA concerning HR 857-American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act, which is in the 108th Congress. The AVMA represents more than 69,000 member veterinarians, comprising over 85% of active veterinarians in the United States. As mentioned in your email, the objective of the AVMA is to advance the science and art of veterinary medicine, including its relationship to public health, biological science and agriculture. The AVMA is the recognized voice for the profession in presenting its views to government, academia, agricultural industry, the media, and other public concerns.

The American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act was reviewed by the members of the AVMA Legislative Advisory Committee. During this process, experts in equine medicine and surgery, animal welfare, animal behavior and other veterinary disciplines provided recommendations to the AVMA's Executive Board. The AVMA Executive Board will not consider supporting the bill unless it adequately addresses: animal welfare, costs related to the care of the horses, environmental concerns with horse carcass disposal, and proposed limits on the selection of euthanasia methods that would prohibit some of the methods that are approved in the 2000 Report of the AVMA Panel on Euthanasia.

Animal Welfare: Presently, HR 857 and a similar draft Senate bill do not address the welfare of horses that could not be slaughtered. The legislation does not establish standards of care that horse rescue facilities must meet in order to receive federal funds to care for these unwanted horses.

Costs Related to the Care of the Horses: Currently, approximately 55,000 horses from the United States are sent to slaughter each year. If those animals cannot be slaughtered, costs related to their care will likely overwhelm the network of horse protection facilities that currently exists in the United States. The proposed legislation establishes USDA grants to assist horse rescue facilities, but the cost of care will likely exceed the funds that will be made available to these facilities.

Environmental Concerns Related to Horse Carcass Disposal: The primary options to dispose of horse carcasses, other than processing at slaughter facilities, include burial, rendering, cremation, placement in a landfill, and composting. However, disposal regulations and methods are state issues, and they vary from state to state. Not all options

are available to all horse owners in all states, and the inevitable disposal of an additional 55,000 horse carcasses per year will result in environmental problems. The cost of disposal for a horse carcass also varies widely by state, from \$10 to \$1500, depending on the method of disposal. There is also concern about soil contamination from euthanasia drugs in buried carcasses.

Limits on Selection of Euthanasia for Horses: As written, HR 857 authorizes emergency and non-emergency euthanasia under certain circumstances. In either emergency or non-emergency cases, euthanasia of these horses must conform to the methods of euthanasia rated "acceptable" in the 2000 report of the Panel on Euthanasia of the AVMA. However, the proposed legislation permits gunshot (an acceptable method) only in cases of emergency, and prohibits captive penetrating bolt and electrocution (methods rated acceptable).

The AVMA appreciates the opportunity to respond to your concerns regarding HR 857, and hopes that this letter clarifies our position with regards to this bill. The AVMA has discussed its concerns with the Agriculture Committee (where the bill currently resides) and individual members of the House of Representatives. We continue to remain open to further dialogue on this bill in hopes of creating a bill that truly benefits the health and welfare of horses.

Sincerely,



Mark Lutschaunig, VMD
Assistant Director
AVMA Governmental Relations Division

Cc: Dr. Gail Golab, AVMA Communications Division
Dr. J. Johnson, AVMA Legislative Advisory Committee