

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 19, 2021

Gary L. Barksdale
Chief Postal Inspector
U.S. Postal Inspection Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza, S.W.,
Washington, D.C., 20260

Dear Inspector Barksdale:

We write with concern regarding USPS's role in transporting animals, specifically birds, for illegal fighting purposes.

Since 2002, the U.S. has prohibited any interstate or foreign transport of animals for fighting purposes. Congress established felony-level penalties for those crimes in 2007, including provision that specifically prohibits any person from using the United States Postal Service ("USPS") to promote or in any other manner further an animal fighting venture.¹ Finally, in 2019, Congress extended this prohibition against animal fighting to U.S. territories. The Supreme Court recently denied a petition from cockfighting interests in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico that challenged the federal government's authority to ban cockfighting everywhere in the U.S., including the territories.

Despite the constitutional soundness and strong penalty provisions discouraging transporting animals for fighting purposes, abundant evidence suggests that this practice is still widespread. In addition to private ground and commercial air transport, evidence suggests that the USPS is also being used for illegal trafficking. According to a review of shipping records obtained by Animal Wellness Action, the Guam Department of Agriculture allowed more than 500 shipments of fighting birds into the territory from state-based cockfighters. There were more than 60

¹ "It shall be unlawful for any person to knowingly use the mail service of the United States Postal Service or any instrumentality of interstate commerce for commercial speech for purposes of advertising an animal, or an instrument described in subsection (d), for use in an animal fighting venture, promoting or in any other manner furthering an animal fighting venture except as performed outside the limits of the States of the United States," according to the statute. 7 U.S.C. § 2156(c) (emphasis added); *see also* 7 U.S.C. 2156(g)(3) (defining "States" to include any territory of the United States).

individuals who collectively shipped more than 10,000 fighting animals to the island, with reports indicating nearly exclusively transport through the U.S. mail.

The federal law also bans the trade in cockfighting implements – the knives and gaffs that are strapped to the combatants’ legs to enhance the bloodletting at the fights. According to a September 2021 story in the El Paso Times, “customs officers at the Memphis air cargo hub seized 5,029 spurs, knives or gaffes used in cockfighting during the past two fiscal years, compared with seizures of 50 pieces during the previous three — an increase due in large part to Neipert's focus on targeting the contraband.”² While those fighting implements came into the U.S. by means other than USPS carriers, there is a brisk trade in fighting implements within the U.S. and Animal Wellness Action has gathered evidence that the U.S. mail is the primary means of transport for this contraband.

The U.S. Customs and Border Protection have taken significant steps in recent years to improve enforcement work in the stopping the transport of animals for fighting purposes. The Department of Justice and the USDA’s Office of Inspector General have also ramped up their work against animal fighting. We believe it is time for USPS to renew its focus on preventing the transport of animals for this deadly sport.

We request USPS develop a comprehensive strategy that includes detailed plans on how it will stop illegal trafficking of animals for fighting purposes and what barriers it faces in doing so, and report to Congress expeditiously on the development and specifics of that plan. Additionally, given the pattern of cockfighting activity in Guam, there should be specific focus on preventing illegal trafficking of birds there. We understand that training and investigations will be required for your agents in Guam given that some birds may be legally transported through the U.S. mails there.

We hope that you and your team will treat the illegal shipment of fighting animals as a high priority going forward. Thank you for your attention to this serious matter.

Sincerely,



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



Nancy Mace
Member of Congress

² Villagran, Lauren. “Right out of Freddy Krueger's Closet': Blades Used in Cockfighting Shipped to US from Mexico.” *El Paso Times*, El Paso Times, 26 Sept. 2021, <https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/2021/09/16/cockfighting-blades-shipped-from-mexico-intercepted-by-customs-border-patrol/8062435002/>.

____/s/____
Jim Cooper
Member of Congress

____/s/____
Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress

____/s/____
Kurt Schrader
Member of Congress

____/s/____
Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress

____/s/____
Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

____/s/____
Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress

____/s/____
Dina Titus
Member of Congress

____/s/____
Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

____/s/____
Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress

____/s/____
Scott H. Peters
Member of Congress

____/s/____
Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress

____/s/____
Angie Craig
Member of Congress

____/s/____
Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress

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Bill Posey
Member of Congress

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Michael Guest
Member of Congress

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Fred Upton
Member of Congress

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Don Bacon
Member of Congress

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Lance Gooden
Member of Congress

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Drew Ferguson
Member of Congress

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Buddy Carter
Member of Congress

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Mike Garcia
Member of Congress

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John Katko
Member of Congress

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Claudia Tenney
Member of Congress

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Zoe Lofgren
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Chris Pappas
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Jahana Hayes
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Lucy McBath
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Troy A. Carter Jr.
Member of Congress

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Julia Brownley
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Colin Allred
Member of Congress

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Jim McGovern
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Joe Neguse
Member of Congress

____/s/____
Alma Adams
Member of Congress