Cockfighting is barbaric, often associated with other illegal behavior, a threat to avian health, and universally criminalized throughout the United States

_The U.S. Territories are part of the United States and they should observe U.S. law_

- **No jurisdiction within the U.S. should be an enclave or refuge for this kind of intentional cruelty.** Staged fights pit animals against each other for the sole purpose of gambling and entertainment. The animals are often drugged to heighten their aggression; they are forced to keep fighting even after they’ve suffered grievous injuries such as broken bones, deep gashes, punctured lungs and pierced eyes. In cockfighting, birds have metal weapons attached to their legs and typically suffer slow painful deaths. “Culture” cannot be a defense for inexcusable abuse that severely harms animals and poses threats to public health and safety.

- **The presence of an above-ground industry anywhere undermines the prohibitions in other parts of the country.** Tolerance for cockfighting gives animal fighters an unwarranted measure of legitimacy, a market for fighting animals and paraphernalia, and venues for the conduct of their staged cruelty. All 50 states have banned the practice, and Congress has made it illegal everywhere. The rule of law must be enforced, especially when it comes to a destructive and dangerous activity like cockfighting.

- **There shouldn’t be one set of rules against animal fighting in all 50 states and a different set of rules for the U.S. territories.** The U.S. Congress, with all of its diversity and partisan divisions, has repeatedly and overwhelmingly strengthened the federal law against animal fighting, underscoring the broad social consensus against staged animal fighting. In fact, since 2002, Congress has upgraded the federal law against animal fighting five times, including upgrades on each of the last four Farm bills.

- **Animal fighting is often closely associated with other criminal activities, such as gangs, gambling, drug trafficking, illegal weapons dealing, public corruption and violent crimes including homicide.** Multiple federal investigations have revealed animal fighting to be an intricate and organized criminal enterprise responsible for moving multi-ton quantities of heroin and methamphetamines across the country. There have been numerous violent incidents at cockfights including the murder of a referee at a fight in Miami in 2018.

- **Cockfighting is a threat to avian health.** Cockfighting has been identified as the cause of avian flu outbreaks, including a major 2019 outbreak in southern California which led to the state killing over 3.2 million birds to slow the spread of the disease. In a 2004 letter to Congress, the USDA noted that cockfighting had been implicated in the introduction and spread of exotic Newcastle disease in California in the prior two years, triggering eradication efforts at a taxpayer cost of nearly $200 million and causing millions of dollars in lost export markets for the U.S. poultry industry. The National Chicken Council wrote in 2004 that “we are concerned that the nationwide traffic in game birds creates a continuing hazard for the dissemination of animal diseases.” Local news reports have linked cockfighting to the deaths of several people in Asia from bird flu, and the World Health Organization noted that human cases of avian influenza in Thailand and Vietnam may have been contracted through cockfighting activity.
Roosters and other animals used for fighting are at risk even when they are not in a fighting pit. Typically tethered to the ground on large outdoor plots of land, fighting animals are unable to flee or seek protection in an emergency. It is highly likely that recent hurricanes in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands resulted in the deaths of large numbers of animals by drowning or other miserable means.

Animal welfare advocates have pursued an end to cockfighting in the U.S. territories and the states with equal zeal. Cockfighting arenas were not insignificant in number in Arizona, Louisiana, New Mexico or Oklahoma, the last set of states with legal cockfighting and that we’d worked in to outlaw the activity by ballot initiative or acts of the state legislatures. Efforts to ban animal fighting in U.S. territories follow efforts to ban the practice on the mainland and to ensure that federal law will apply to interstate forms of animal fighting. This bill will establish universal standards to prohibit animal fighting and its inherent cruelty.