



Tennessee Sheriffs' Association, Inc.

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Dear Representatives,

On behalf of the Tennessee Sheriffs' Association, I am writing to convey our strong support for the FIGHT Act, H.R. 2742, and to urge you to cosponsor this crucial legislation and work for its enactment in the 118th Congress. As sheriffs dedicated to keeping Tennesseans safe, we are acutely aware of the adverse effects that animal fighting crimes have on our communities.

Tennessee has had persistent animal fighting problems, with the federal government conducting a major bust of two fighting pits in 2005 in Cocke County that revealed not only barbaric animal cruelty, but also chop shops, prostitution rings, and minors gambling large sums of money at the fights.

The United States has a robust law against animal fighting (7 U.S.C. § 2132), which Congress has strengthened multiple times in the 21st century. We believe that the FIGHT Act will build on Congress's prior efforts and allow us to make even stronger gains against illegal animal fighting in the years ahead.

As noted, animal fighting is not a minor or isolated concern for law enforcement; it is a form of organized crime that is intricately linked with other serious offenses, including illegal gambling, weapons possession, money laundering, and drug trafficking. These activities undermine the well-being of our communities, and they are vices we neither want nor need in Tennessee.

The FIGHT Act will empower federal law enforcement to take additional actions against illegal animal fighters. Federal agents often collaborate with local police and our county attorneys, a partnership we greatly value. Many organized crime syndicates involved in animal fighting include individuals with extensive criminal histories, and their networks often span county, state, and even national boundaries. Dogfighting and cockfighting are national and international enterprises, and it takes cooperation between law enforcement agencies at all levels to combat these crimes effectively.

Tennessee is, by number of farms, one of the biggest agricultural states in the nation, and the state has a sizeable amount of avian agriculture. We are particularly concerned about past instances of smuggled fighting birds from Mexico, which have led to the spread of disease. Currently, we are on high alert for the spread of H5N1, commonly known as bird flu. Zoonotic diseases pose significant public health risks and could have devastating economic consequences for farmers and related businesses.

The handling of seized fighting animals has been a barrier to enforcement, as some animal fighting operations involve hundreds of animals needing placement. The federal government, in partnership with nonprofit animal welfare organizations, can play an essential supplemental role in our efforts to place seized animals humanely and remove them from violent, life-threatening situations.

Tennessee is a strong leader in law and order and your cosponsorship of the FIGHT Act will significantly benefit our collective efforts to eradicate vicious animal cruelty and associated crimes. Together, we can protect our communities, uphold the rule of law, and safeguard our state's agricultural industry.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We look forward to hearing your response to our request.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Jeff Bledsoe, Ret.
Executive Director
Tennessee Sheriffs' Association

Leadership in Law Enforcement
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