July 18, 2025

The Honorable Joni Ernst
260 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Ernst,

The Fighting Inhumane Gambling and High-Risk Trafficking (FIGHT) Act, H.R. 3946, is important to North Central Poultry Association and many of our members. Nationwide, more than 800 law enforcement, agricultural, and animal welfare organizations support this legislation.

Iowa is the largest egg-producing state and stopping the illegal movement of fighting animals, especially cockfighting, is vital to our nation's poultry industry and to public health. Infectious disease risks to commercial poultry from illegal cockfighting activity are a well-established, documented concern to us, to consumers, and to the many people who derive employment from our uninterrupted operations.

Our farmers adhere to strict animal care and animal welfare standards and North Central Poultry Association has been an industry leader in promoting those practices. Cockfighting is the antithesis of proper animal care, and on that basis alone, North Central Poultry Association supports efforts to crack down on the grisly and inherently violent practice of cockfighting. As you know, cockfighters attach knives or gaffs to the birds' legs to deliver intentional, mortal wounds to the animals.

We are also deeply concerned about an additional feature of cockfighting – its role in the transmission of disease, with sickened cockfighting birds infecting laying hen and broiler bird operations. Cockfighting has been implicated in the spread of a wide range of pathogens to other birds. There are well documented concerns about the transmission of Avian Influenza and virulent Newcastle Disease, to name just a few, to commercial poultry, leading to mass depopulation efforts and billions in expenses to our federal government. Birds reared in many backyard cockfighting operations are ill with a range of respiratory diseases and widely dispersed in illegal commerce, threatening poultry production across the United States. We are particularly concerned about the illegal movement of fighting birds from Mexico into the Southwest, where we also maintain major laying-hen flocks. Virulent Newcastle Disease is endemic in Mexico, and there is a robust illegal trade that the United States must interdict for the health and operational safety of our poultry industry.

Cockfighting has played a major role in the spread of H5N1 in Asia, and now that virus is in the U.S. and has triggered major containment efforts by our agricultural agencies. Cockfighting may have a role in reviving the outbreak and that is a risk we as a nation cannot take. An invigorated outbreak could cost our nation tens of billions of dollars as well as cost Iowa egg producers and others in the Midwest millions of dollars. As of June 2025, 174.5 million poultry have been killed due to avian influenza infection or exposure in 787 commercial flocks and 921 backyard flocks in all 50 states. In Iowa, this includes more than 25 million commercial laying hens.

Cockfighting birds are kept under the radar and as such evade veterinarian inspections and safeguards that have been established to control various poultry and zoonotic diseases. Such birds are often moved across state lines without proper permits or inspections leading to highly probable disease proliferation.

Cockfighting is an organized criminal enterprise. It makes our communities unsafe, as it is bound up with money laundering, narcotics trafficking, and high-stakes illegal gambling in addition to its animal cruelty core.

We are enthusiastic supporters of the FIGHT Act. It is our sincere hope that you'll cosponsor this bill and play a role in shepherding it to passage, joining the original co-sponsors of this bill, well divided by political party

We stand ready to help in advocating for H.R. 3946 and its Senate companion, S. 1454 to see it adopted during the 119th Congress. We cannot afford to let this important, broadly supported legislation languish.

Sincerely,

Kevin Stiles
Executive Director
North Central Poultry Association