



May 14, 2026

The Honorable W. Stephen Muldrow
United States Attorney
United States Attorney's Office for the District of Puerto Rico
Torre Chardón, Suite 1201
350 Carlos Chardón Street
San Juan, PR 00918

Mr. Adam Gustafson
Assistant Attorney General
Environment and Natural Resources Division
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Washington, D.C. 20530

Re: Request for Federal Enforcement Action Against Participants in Illegal Cockfighting Venture in Puerto Rico

Dear U.S. Attorney Muldrow:

On behalf of Animal Wellness Action, we write to urge your office to investigate and, where warranted, prosecute two internationally known horse jockeys reportedly identified at an illegal cockfighting event in Puerto Rico. Jockeys Jose Ortiz and Irad Ortiz, Jr., along with MLB pitcher Edwin Diaz, are linked to illegal cockfighting in Puerto Rico through social media posts.

Congress has made animal fighting ventures illegal throughout the United States and its territories under Section 26 of the Animal Welfare Act, codified at 7 U.S.C. § 2156. Federal law prohibits knowingly sponsoring, exhibiting, attending, or otherwise participating in an animal fighting venture. The law also criminalizes the possession, transport, and promotion of animals used for fighting.

The federal courts have repeatedly upheld the constitutionality and applicability of these prohibitions in Puerto Rico. In 2021, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit affirmed that Congress had validly outlawed cockfighting in Puerto Rico and throughout the United States and its territories, stating the law "is a valid exercise of Congress's Commerce Clause power and does not violate plaintiffs' individual rights." See *Hernandez-Gotay v. United States*, 985 F.3d 71 (1st Cir. 2021). That appellate decision also affirmed the district court holding that "Congress acted well within its constitutional authority in extending the prohibition on animal fighting ventures to Puerto Rico." See *Club Gallístico de Puerto Rico, Inc. v. United States*, 414 F. Supp. 3d 191 (D.P.R. 2019).

Despite the clarity of federal law, illegal cockfighting operations continue to function openly in Puerto Rico, often involving gambling, trafficking of fighting birds, narcotics activity, and other organized criminal conduct. These ventures also pose significant biosecurity and animal disease risks through the interstate and international movement of fighting birds. In the seven years since the federal prohibition on animal fighting in the U.S. Territories was enacted, the Department of Justice

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has apparently taken no action to address brazen, staged animal fights at dozens of high-profile venues in Puerto Rico or other territories. It is time to enforce American anti-cruelty laws.

Cockfighters in Puerto Rico are also illegally selling fighting birds to their brethren in the states, undermining mainland enforcement of our state and federal anti-cruelty laws. We've worked with regional humane groups from Ohio to Florida and learned of these illegal transports.

Public reports and photographic evidence indicate that high-profile professional athletes attended or participated in a cockfighting event, warranting serious federal scrutiny. Celebrity participation in illegal animal fighting normalizes criminal conduct, undermines deterrence, and sends a dangerous signal that federal law will not be enforced equally against prominent individuals or in certain regions.

Animal Wellness Action respectfully requests that your office:

1. Open a formal investigation into the reported cockfighting event and all identifiable participants;
2. Determine whether violations of 7 U.S.C. § 2156 and related federal statutes occurred;
3. Coordinate with federal law-enforcement agencies to identify organizers, operators, spectators, and financial beneficiaries connected to the venues operating cockfighting derbies; and
4. Act to reflect that federal law enforcement treats anti-cockfighting laws as fully applicable to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.
5. Direct that federal law enforcement agencies serve notice to all cockfighting venues that they are operating outside the law and that the enforcement will result if they do not terminate their illegal activities.

Cockfighting is organized animal cruelty tied to illegal gambling and other criminal enterprises, and Congress has spoken decisively on this issue through repeated strengthening of the federal statute. These are felony crimes.

We look forward to hearing from you, and, as in the past, we stand ready to provide addresses and other details of organized animal fighting ventures in Puerto Rico, as we have done in the past.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Wayne Pacelle".

Wayne Pacelle
Animal Wellness Action, President