



## Ontario Association of Equine Practitioners

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Thank you Mr. Chairman & committee members. I am Dr. Robin Reid-Burke, president of the Ontario Association of Equine Practitioners (OAEP) and Dr. Alison Moore is Chair of the OAEP Racing Committee.

The Ontario Association of Equine Practitioners (OAEP) is a professional association representing equine veterinarians in the Province of Ontario. We facilitate communication and collegiality among equine practitioners, support continuing education, and provide a link between equine clinical practice, academia, industry, media, government and the community.

We are here to urge you to revise the changes proposed in Bill 55. The planned March 31, 2013 termination of the Slots at Racetracks Program has thrown the Ontario horse racing, breeding industry as well as those involved in equine veterinary medicine into crisis.

The racing industry is the second largest agricultural sector in the province, while the Slots at Racetracks Program generates over \$1.1 billion a year for the Ontario government; loss of this revenue sharing will affect the livelihood of the 31, 441 full time racing industry participants and those in associated industries, thus impacting 60,000 people in the province at a time when jobs are critical to the economy.

The termination of the Slots at Racetracks Program will affect the health and welfare of all Ontario horses. It will directly negatively impact the profession of equine veterinary medicine, the veterinarians who have dedicated their lives to the care of these tremendous equine athletes and to the breeding industry that produces them.

The racing industry has had a considerable impact on veterinary medicine in Ontario. Racehorse veterinarians have always been on the forefront of equine medicine. The racing industry has been the engine that drives advances in equine diagnostics and therapeutics owing to the significant monetary investments owners have in their horses and the high expectation for veterinary care. Long gone are the days of James Harriott. Equine veterinary medicine is an expert-driven industry with veterinarians focusing often on only one equine sporting discipline. Even within the racing sector, veterinarians will concentrate their service provisions to one of thoroughbred, quarter horse or standardbred race horses underlying the very specific and different nature of disorders affecting the individual breeds. Very few will work on more than one breed and most do not work on non-racing horses. The elimination of the Slots at Racetracks Program will force many to retrain in other areas of equine medicine and some may leave the profession all together.

The development of state-of-the-art equipment to improve diagnostics and therapeutics has been driven by the investment made by all participants in the racing industry and an expectation to provide the highest quality of care to the horse. With the onset of the Slots at Racetracks Program in the '90s, the infusion of money into the industry created an infrastructure that promoted the growth and development of racehorse veterinary practices. Along with equipment investments, veterinarians hired more associates, more technical help and established new clinics. On average a mobile equine veterinary practitioner has \$50 000 to \$150 000 worth of specialized equipment in their truck. Most racehorse veterinarians utilize portable digital x-ray equipment, ranging in cost from \$50 000 to \$90 000 and a



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portable high resolution ultrasonography unit costing from \$25 000 to \$ 40 000. The licensed equine clinics in Ontario, equipped to provide major surgery, hospitalization and radiology services, have made capital expenditures in excess of \$ 2.5 million each. With the success of the Slots at Racetracks Program, one clinic invested in the purchase of a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) unit at a cost of \$700,000. With the termination of the Slots at Racetracks program as proposed in Bill 55 veterinarians will be forced to refinance or sell their equipment, lay off personnel and refuse new hires. With the elimination of the Slots at Racetracks Program, an estimated 30% reduction in equine veterinarians in Ontario can be expected which translates to 40 fewer veterinarians. If each veterinarian bills \$400 000-500 000 per year that is a reduction of 16-20 million dollars in taxable billings. Each of those veterinarians has a support staff of 1 or 2 people so another 40-80 jobs will be lost along with 1.2 - 2.4 million in lost wages.

The racehorse breeding industry has already been severely impacted. The decrease in breeding by 50% already this year has affected the veterinarians who specialize in equine reproduction and derive a significant part of their annual income during this season. Some have already been forced to lay-off veterinarians and technical help. The breeding of horses for the racing industry has also furthered reproductive success and treatments given the financial investment in offspring. Embryo transfer techniques (including frozen embryo implantation), artificial insemination and neonatal intensive care have been developed to enhance the industry. Future improvements in reproductive techniques and technologies are at risk of not being developed if financial drivers are not present.

There has been a considerable amount of research made possible by funds derived from the Slots at Racetracks program. Almost 100% of the funding provided to Equine Guelph for research into equine diseases and disorders is derived from the racing industry. This research has produced internationally renowned treatments which have benefited all breeds not just those involved in racing. Our own Ontario Veterinary College is engaging in pioneering research into using stem cells to treat cartilage injuries in horses. Regenerative medicine, such as platelet rich plasma therapy, is more commonly part of injury treatment in racehorse practice mirroring the treatments that take place with our professional human athletes, particularly in the National Football League and Major League Baseball. In fact, the care of our equine athletes equals or surpasses that of our human counterparts. The availability of rehabilitation modalities such as underwater treadmills, saltwater therapy tanks, laser treatments, massage therapists, chiropractors and acupuncturists have all increased exponentially during life of the Slots at Racetracks program. Ontario Veterinary College researchers have also developed a new technique for treating atrial fibrillation in horses, a condition relatively common in race horses, which has allowed for a treatment option for those horses not involved in racing. With the termination of the Slots at Racetracks program research like this will be limited thus restricting the availability of those treatments to racing horses as well as athletic horses in other capacities such as those on our gold and silver medal winning Olympic equestrian team. It is not difficult to understand that a financially strong racing sector drives improved welfare for all of the 300,000 horses in Ontario.

Not only is equine research invaluable to all horses, but humans may also benefit from investigation into equine conditions. The North American concept of "One Medicine" supports research that compares medical conditions and diseases in humans and animals, looking for similarities in the development of disease, diagnosis and treatment. For example, cardiac conditions in athletes, joint injury and cartilage



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repair in equine and human patients are areas currently being collaboratively researched at the University of Guelph, McMaster University and the University of Western Ontario. Racehorses may hold the key to solving these serious human health conditions. However, if the Slots at Racetrack Program contract is broken, future scientific investigation will be negatively impacted.

Pharmaceutical companies have also invested significant amounts of money developing and licensing medication for use in equine patients. The funds derived from the Slots at Racetrack Program have fueled their ability to provide equine veterinarians with cutting edge medications. A significant reduction in investment in the development of new equine medications and vaccinations as well as escalation in the cost of medication to all horse owners will certainly occur if the Slots at Racetrack Program is terminated.

Finally, what will happen to the surplus of racehorses if the contract for the Slots at Racetracks Program is broken? Some will be rehomed while many others will be sent for slaughter or euthanized. It is wholly unacceptable. The fate of hundreds to thousands of horses rests with the decision of this committee to revise the changes proposed in Bill 55 and in turn the Slots at Racetracks Program.

Lastly, one more important point should be made. Ontario horse racing IS Canadian horse racing - 58% of the Canadian racing product is based in Ontario. This province has developed one of the strongest racing industries in the world. Its global impact was recently highlighted when a study led by researchers in Ireland showed that the "speed gene" in modern thoroughbred racehorses can be traced back to the great EP Taylor studs, Nearctic and Northern Dancer. The Canadian stallion Northern Dancer is considered, "the most influential stallion of modern times". It takes a team of people to produce a racehorse and the OAEP is extremely proud of our racing industry. It should be encouraged to grow and prosper and not be destroyed - the lives of these exceptional horses and of the people devoted to them should not be destroyed.

The OAEP supports the Standardbred Breeders of Ontario Association (SBOA) recommendation for the Government to undertake a thorough economic impact study of the OLG's expanded gaming plans and its effect on the Ontario racing industry. This study should be completed with appropriate industry consultation before any further changes to the Slots at Racetrack Program are instituted.

To quote a 2011 report prepared for the Government of Canada entitled "Healthy Animals, Healthy Canada"; "Animals (horses) are integral to Canadian culture and society, to our economic well-being and, in many ways, to our health. We implore you Mr. Chairman & committee members to revise the changes proposed in Bill 55 as well as the hasty and short-sighted termination of the Slots at Racetracks Program.