

February 28, 2014

Testimony Concerning House bill 5044 - An Act Concerning Domesticated horses

Senator Meyer, Representative Gentile and members of the Environment Committee,

My name is Steve Milne, I am a professional horseman who has worked in Connecticut for almost 18 years, I have worked with trail, rental, hunt, personal, high performance horses and horse involved in the Olympic disciplines. I am often called upon to deal with "problem horses". For more information on my experience and competence see stevemilne.net.

I support Governor' House Bill 5044.

The conclusion horses are violent animals is not based in fact. While it is true a handful of people get hurt riding and working with horses it is never due to vicious behavior. It is not in a horse's nature. Horses are prey animals. They have no camouflage, they have no horns or antlers or sharp teeth or poison or any other potentially offensive weapons. They run from danger whenever possible. If a horse bucks a rider off it is to escape the rider not to hurt him. If a horse spooks (startles) and the rider falls, the horse was escaping perceived danger. The only time a horse will act aggressively is to protect himself, or a herd mate, or a baby, or to protect their space. But even aggressive behavior is mostly intimidation. It is an adaption that helps the species. If they fight and get hurt there is no way to stop infection. So they never fight if there is any choice. The first thing they will do is move away. If they cannot they will defend themselves. While these have been my observations I am far from the only person to know this. Countless books and studies document the nature of the horse and why he behaves the way he does. (I am happy to provide titles)

This nature of the horse is what drew humans to him about 8000 years ago. The size and speed a relative easy to domesticate made horses the most significant animal in the history of the world. They have been at our sides in every endeavor. They allowed trade as they could travel to far places and carry a bigger load than a man. They allowed territorial expansion. They gave huge advantage in battle. They worked the farms allowing more land to be planted than ever before. Delivered the mail. In some cases such as the pony express in difficult and dangerous conditions. Mining, forestry, Policing, and much more.

There is no shortage of opportunities for horses to attack if they wish. At 5 to 10 times our size with great strength and faster reaction time they would succeed much of the time. They weigh at least twice what a Bengal Tiger weighs. Instead we have to protect them from human abuse because they take it and do not fight back as a rule. Again there is no shortage of proof of animal abuse. The big powerful animal beaten, shot, stabbed, acid poured on them. And they do not fight back.

Lastly, domestic horses are virtually always contained in some way. A lead rope, bridle, stall, paddock, pasture or horse trailer. They are not loose in our society to prey on "hapless victims". If we want to interact with a horse we must go to them. This is about keeping the horses safe and available it is not designed to protect humans from horses, but it can serve that purpose. Unfortunately those ignorant to the nature of a horse are to ignorant to use the built in safeguards. This ignorance in no way makes horses violent or vicious.

The current Equine law warns of inherent risks. That is realistic and fact based. The proposed House bill 5044 - An Act Concerning Domesticated horses, will clarify the law. It has my support.

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Connecticut - Assumption of risk by person engaged in recreational equestrian activities when, each person engaged in recreational equestrian activities shall assume the risk and legal responsibility of any injury to his person or property arising out of the hazards inherent in equestrian sports, unless the injury was proximately caused by negligence of the person providing the horse or horses to the individual engaged in recreational equestrian activities or the failure to warn against a dangerous condition, use, structure or activity by the person providing the horses or his agents or employees.