

June 10, 2016

Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall

Good morning Honorable Senator Myron Jackson  
Chairman of the Committee on Culture, Historic Preservation, Youth and Recreation,  
And to the Esteemed Members of the Senate  
Fellow Testifiers and Guests in attendance:

I am Dr. Bethany Bradford, Director of Veterinary Services for the VI Department of Agriculture. I am here to give testimony on behalf of the VI Department of Agriculture and its role in the race horse industry.

The Division of Veterinary Services (VS) consists of 4 staff in St. Croix, including myself. There is no exclusive veterinary staff in St. Thomas or St. John.

VS is responsible for the health and welfare of all animals in the Territory. While we provide veterinary services to livestock and poultry farmers daily, Veterinary Services is involved with imported and exported horses and stray horses. VS maintains an extensive data base of horses that are identified by microchip as mandated by law 19 VIC Ss 2616. Currently we have over 1300 horses and nearly 200 horses.

Here is a breakdown of horse-related issues handled by Veterinary Services:

January 2016 through May 2016		COSTS/HOUR
Number of Horses Imported	14	1-2 manhours/shipment \$30/hr (45) <i>\$75/import permit fee</i>
Number of Horses Impounded	4	3 staff/3-9 man hour \$45/hr \$135-405/case (270)
Number of Car Accidents with Horses Reported	1	
Number of horses euthanized	4	3 staff/case, \$70/hr 1-2 hours/2-6 manhour \$140-\$420/case (270) \$25/horse euthanasia
Number of Stray Horse Calls	93	

Because of the current situation on the racetracks with the lack of promoters and races, the number of imported horses has fallen from a high of 74 in 2014 to 34 in 2015. Currently only 14 horses have been imported this year. This has meant fewer horses retiring and fewer stray horse problems such as vehicular accidents and roaming horses.

Retired race horses in the VI in general have limited options. In St. Thomas, some of the horses are eligible for relocation to the states by Virgin Islands Horse Rescue and Retirement. Others have been retired to the Golden Age Ranch for trail riding and retirement. These are good options and are well deserving of continued funding but these options are limited and consume many resources. Relocation in general is limited because USVI is under federal quarantine for the *Boophilus* tick and tick fever or *babesiosis*. Any horses that are infected with tick fever cannot return to the states. In St. Thomas this is usually not a problem. However, because of the way racehorses are kept in St. Croix, this very often means that they are infected with tick fever, although they are not ill, and will never be eligible to be returned to the states.

In the long run, however, more will need to be done to address retired racehorses so we do not end up with the stray and neglect issues of the past.

VIDOA has received funding for equine training workshops by the Racino bill. To date VIDOA has sponsored three training workshops with Cornell University School of Veterinary Medicine in both St. Croix and St. Thomas. There has been support from the horse owners both on the racetrack and in the community and attendance has been increasing. These workshops are critical to educating horse owners and promoting proper animal care for all horses.

In addition to education, enforcement of existing animal control and welfare laws needs to be much improved. Owners who import a horse and local horse owners should be held accountable for the condition and care of their horses from import or birth until retirement and death. This can be done through the enforcement of existing laws. However, enforcement officers are needed as well as understanding and support from the Office of the Attorney General and the courts.

I appreciate this opportunity.

Thank you.

