

# Assembly Bill 2177

## Equine Welfare and Safety in Horsing Racing

Assembly Member Ash Kalra

### SUMMARY

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AB 2177 would enact comprehensive reforms and improvements in horse racing by following best practices and recommendations by the California Horse Racing Board to ensure minimal equine (horse) injury and eliminate contributing factors that can result in preventable equine death

If the state is to continue to sanction horse racing and its wagering as a legal sport, reducing horse racing fatalities and enhancing track safety to the greatest extent possible needs to take precedence.

### BACKGROUND

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Horse racing in California is overseen and regulated by the California Horse Racing Board (CHRB) and is responsible for ensuring safety standards for the horses, riders, and workers at racetracks. Reducing horse fatalities at racetracks and training facilities is a key focus for CHRB and the horse racing industry.

Although horse fatalities have decreased by 60 percent over the past 13 years, recent surges in horse fatalities and concerns about the safety and welfare of horses necessitates additional reforms and improvements in horse racing.

A surprising number of racing-related horse deaths at Santa Anita Park in Arcadia during the 2019-racing seasons occurred, totaling 37 horse deaths at this racetrack alone in a one-year period beginning December 26, 2018. The overall horse racing industry has consistently sustained more than 100 horse deaths every year on all California tracks combined.

Use of medications and supplements, running horses with injuries, and other pressures to enhance racing performance are considered contributing factors in horse racing fatalities.

Track conditions are also a significant factor. Rain, hot weather, maintenance practices and varying track surfaces are all factors in how track surfaces can contribute to how and whether a horse may sustain an injury. When combined with other prevailing factors, such as running an injured horse or a horse that is unnecessarily medicated, track surfaces can further influence horse injuries and deaths.

On December 19, 2019, after investigating the deaths at Santa Anita Park, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office released a report calling for a number of safety precautions to mitigate equine fatalities and a more coordinated effort to protect both horses and their riders.

Evidence from necropsies show that the vast majority of racing horses that had broken bones and required euthanasia had pre-existing injuries that went unnoticed. While trainers, jockeys, and racing stewards try their best to prevent equine deaths, the *authorized* use of performance enhancing medications and the lack of systems to identify those injuries with independent veterinarians can result in catastrophic, and often fatal, events. The report by Los Angeles County District Attorney even determined that the majority of those horses that died had performance enhancing medications in their systems – sometimes as many as eight different drugs.

### SOLUTION

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AB 2177 enacts a number of bold comprehensive reforms and safety improvements designed to curb equine fatalities in horse racing. Because the cause of each equine death is multi-faceted and complex, solutions to reduce horse racing deaths must also be varied and rely on a variety of industry best practices.

The routine use of medications to treat non-medical conditions must be strictly prohibited. AB 2177 expands prohibitions on using performance enhancing medications by strictly eliminating the use of any medication unless it is to treat a specific medical condition within the context of a veterinarian-client patient relationship. For major racetracks, the bill will require all medications be dispensed from an onsite central pharmacy to control medication use and abuse.

Major racetracks, including Del Mar, Golden Gate Fields, Los Alamitos, and Santa Anita, will also be required to invest in track safety improvements and deploy precautions to reduce equine fatalities.

AB 2177 will also standardize best practices in horse racing and empower the California Horse Racing Board (CHRB) and veterinarians to take necessary action to prevent injured or unfit horses from running. This includes enhancing horse inspections, increasing recuperation time, and coordinating reviews of veterinary and racing records to help better identify horses at risk of a catastrophic injury.

Specifically, the bill will ensure trainers are educated and encouraged to provide horses sufficient time to recuperate from exercise-induced microdamage and will empower veterinarians to flag horse unfit to race.

Following CHRB recommendations, AB 2177 would modify confidentiality requirements to make public positive tests for horses with a prohibited drug in their system, allocate penalty revenues to horse welfare and safety measures, and permit coordinated inspection of veterinary medical records for horses.

AB 2177 also increases penalties to deter trainers from violating safety requirements and authorizes CHRB to suspend or revoke a license for repeated violations and for the removal of a trainer following the death of a horse.

## CO-SPONSORS

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- People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
- Social Compassion in Legislation

## CONTACT

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