

Gentlemen,

We would appreciate your consideration of the following note and respectfully ask that it be included in your board packet to the commissioners as our official statement regarding the 2017 race dates application. Thank you.

The Illinois Harness Horsemen's Association understands and trusts that one of the most critical responsibilities for the Illinois Racing Board is the administering of the race dates schedule. While gathering the facts for this decision, which is crucial to the survival of the industry in this state, we implore you to find a way to ensure a standardbred winter meet, similar to the one offered in 2016.

We have discussed this issue with Hawthorne numerous times, suggesting many different cost saving and creative ways to make it work, but to no avail. A winter meet would allow horses to take 4-6 weeks off at the conclusion of this summer meet and then get back into training to be ready for January 1. Importantly, such a meet would provide a much needed incentive to owners and trainers to keep horses in Illinois, rather than shipping out to other states. To be clear, we believe strongly that a schedule which includes no racing from the end of September, 2016, until May, 2017, will potentially decimate the horse population in Illinois and send horsemen either to other states to ply their trade or completely out of the business.

The Illinois Harness Horsemen's Association believes it is imperative that everyone involved at the Illinois Racing Board truly understand the devastating effects for harness horsemen of the 2017 dates application made by Illinois racetracks. As far back as any record keeping goes, never has there been a seven month lull in pari-mutual Illinois harness racing. Just a quick peak below gives everyone an idea of what has recently occurred in Illinois. As a reminder, racing dates or racing opportunities and the purses attached to those opportunities are how the horsemen get paid. Those are our paychecks. An owner wouldn't pay a trainer to care for his horse without the possibility of earning it back on the racetrack. Subsequently, without those opportunities, there would be no industry. The submitted dates application for 2017, requesting only 80 race dates from May to September, would reduce racing opportunities by over 22% from 2016 and by a staggering 69% in just the past six years.

Live Racing Dates or Opportunities:

Harness

2016	(1 racetrack)	103 programs
2014	(2 racetracks)	192 programs
2011	(2 racetracks)	254 programs
2002	(3 racetracks)	357 programs
1995	(5 racetracks)	656 programs

The standardbred breeding industry is also directly affected by the racing schedule. The breeding of race horses is a significant piece of Illinois's agribusiness community. The consequence of less racing opportunities directly coincides with the decline in the breeding industry in Illinois, and the numbers strongly bear this out.

Registered Racehorses (foals) in year:

	Harness
2016	241
2015	446
2014	499
2010	660
2002	1,343

As the numbers above clearly show, having sufficient racing opportunities in Illinois is critical to the health of the standardbred racing industry.

The Illinois Racing Board is responsible for enforcement of the statute governing horse racing in Illinois known as the Illinois Horse Racing Act.

#### **LEGISLATIVE INTENT**

The Illinois Horse Racing Act of 1975 is intended to benefit the people of the State of Illinois by assisting economic development and promoting Illinois tourism.

The General Assembly finds and declares it to be the public policy of the State of Illinois to:

- a. Support and enhance Illinois' horse racing industry, which is a significant component within the agribusiness industry;
- b. Ensure that Illinois' horse racing industry remains competitive with neighboring states;
- c. Stimulate growth within Illinois' horse racing industry, thereby encouraging new investment and development to produce additional tax revenues and to create additional jobs;
- d. Promote the further growth of tourism;
- e. Encourage the breeding of thoroughbred and standardbred horses in Illinois; and
- f. Ensure that public confidence and trust in the credibility and integrity of racing operations and the regulatory process is maintained

The current dates application submitted by Hawthorne does not further the goals of the Illinois Horse Racing Act of 1975, because it does not provide sufficient racing opportunities and includes a more than seven month gap in live racing in Illinois when many horses will be forced to leave and potentially not come back. While the addition of a winter standardbred meet will provide only a minimum level of racing opportunities needed for the industry to survive, horsemen would find this schedule much more tolerable and the increase in race dates would further the goals of the Act. The Illinois Harness Horsemen's Association respectfully requests that the Board require a winter standardbred meet, similar to that conducted in 2016, as part of the 2017 racing schedule.

Thank you.

Illinois Harness Horsemen's Association

